ONTE FELIS

MARY BREARLEY

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Monte Felis

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By Mary Brearley

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Chapter I

ONE afternoon in early October, as the light died out of the sky behind the chimney-pots, Corisande Heaven ran up the steps of her mother's house in Chelsea, and let herself in with her latchkey. In the small hall she paused and shouted:

"Mother!" No reply. "Beatrice!" Still no answer.

"Both out," she commented almost as loudly, her shrill young voice in perpetual contradiction to her extremely fragile appearance.

They had evidently been out all afternoon, for on the little imitation oak table lay the unclaimed three o'clock post. Corisande turned the letters over. Four for Mrs. Heaven as well as a note that had come by hand. A Parish Magazine and a post card for her sister. A fattish envelope bearing a foreign stamp and a regimental crest for herself.

She flushed as she opened it, frowned as she ran her eye over the first sheet, and then pushed it all back into the envelope.

"I wish I weren't so bad at making up my mind," she sighed. "I wish that he was really rich, or . . . or that some Americans didn't have such long upper lips."

She sighed again, and took up the letters addressed to Mrs. Heaven. One by one she scrutinized the envelopes, holding up the thin ones to the light, till she came to the note which had come by hand. Why on earth was Patch Reval writing to her mother?

Mrs. Reval was her future sister-in-law, or so she had thought of her that morning. Now, she wasn't so sure. It was just what she couldn't make up her mind about.

She twisted the thick envelope in her fingers. It had been hastily and only partially stuck down, and almost before she quite knew what she was doing, one of her fingers had inserted itself under the flap. A little further, and it was open, disclosing some of the writing inside. "Poor little Corrie," very distinct in the writer's large dashing hand.

"Poor little Corrie!" What was threatening her? She tore the letter out and opened it.

"Dear Mrs. Heaven," it ran. "The most dreadful news! Those wicked riots and poor darling Maurice badly hurt! A bomb, or something explosive, and they fear he is blind. Isn't it too awful? I should have come myself to tell you but there are these tiresome rehearsals at all hours, and more people than I possibly remember coming to lunch. You may imagine how much heart I have for any of it. My beautiful Maurice! He was *so* handsome, wasn't he? And now I fear he will be quite hideous. However, one mustn't let one's private griefs interfere with one's public obligations. How often in these last dreadful years I have had to remind myself of that! Fondest love to poor little Corrie. Yours v. sincerely, Patricia Reval."

Corisande read the letter through twice, the second time half audibly as if to impress the sense of it on her mind beyond all questioning. A frightened, almost hunted, look appeared on her face as of a very small animal suddenly aware of a trap and only a very narrow margin of escape. When she came to the end she sat down rather heavily on one of the hall chairs, without looking previously to see if it had been dusted.

Fancy if they'd been married as Maurice had wanted when he was home on leave. Where would

she have been now? Alone with a blind man, in a tumble-down old house at the back of beyond, on next to nothing a year. It wasn't that she didn't love him—had loved him. He was so adorably good-looking, with those melancholy long-lidded eyes, that laughed, and said so many things when you looked into them. All her friends had been wild with envy. But now he was probably hideously disfigured. She couldn't bear to see anything horrid; it was silly, but she was like that. He would have to leave the Army, of course, never wear uniform again. India would have been such fun. . . . It was a pretty woman's paradise, according to all the novels she had read. Now there would have to leave the Army, of course; never not the smart country, of big houses, and hunting, and race meetings, and shoots, but the country of five miles from a railway station, candles and oil lamps, the vicar's wife and the doctor's wife, and the eternal drip, drip of the rain.

She saw a vision of herself, beautiful still, but worn and thin, in shabby tweeds and country-made, clod-hopping shoes. Her hands red and scratched with gardening, from which there appeared to be no escape in rural life. And Maurice? Why he wouldn't even be able to dress himself properly.

Blind people got so messy. He might even grow a beard. He would have to, if the only alternative was that she should shave him. She really couldn't do things like that, and if he had a servant, which would be a frightful expense, the man would probably drink, or always be giving notice. It would be impossible to keep servants in such a place. It might even come to her having to do quite a lot of things herself. Blood-chilling stories of people who, since the war, had never had more than an occasional "woman from the village for the rough work" menaced her. Even here in town it had been bad enough. Her sister had made the beds for weeks at a time.

Some women might be able to do it, the sort of women who had been brought up to that sort of thing and were so hopelessly plain, anyhow, that it didn't matter what they looked like. But she—it would kill her. She was sure her lungs were not very strong. Besides, how could they ever be happy living such a life? Maurice would get crankier and crankier. Even the short fortnight they had been engaged before he went away hadn't been all peace. She had found it quite impossible to make him see a lot of things in the way she saw them. She told herself that she had been

feeling for a long time how dreadful it would be if they got married and then it didn't turn out well.

After all, did any Englishman really understand women? Weren't they all utterly selfish when it came to the point? They weren't capable of seeing that a very beautiful girl couldn't be judged by ordinary standards of merit. She was like a great work of art, a national triumph, and as such to be guarded and worshipped, and her every wish satisfied. There were men (not Englishmen who would only laugh if you tried to explain this), who felt it very strongly. It would not be *right* to throw away her gifts, which as had been so truly said, were given her to make the world happier and better. Who could be the better or the happier for them in Little Morton, where nobody, who was anybody, would see her from one year's end to the other?

A fortunate accident had put it in her power to break off her engagement in such a way that no one could suppose that Maurice's blindness had anything to do with it—as of course it hadn't. She had made up her mind long before she knew.

The sound of someone moving overhead roused her from her reflections. She hastily returned Mrs. Reval's letter to its envelope, firmly sticking

down the flap. Her own letter she put into the pocket of her coat, wishing that she had left it unopened. It would have looked as if she had been out all the time.

Tip-toeing across the hall she opened the door noiselessly and went out into the dusky street. There was no one in sight as she made her way to the nearest Tube station and took a ticket for Dover Street. As she stood on the platform waiting for a train she looked like a shaft of sunlight in a dingy area, a Psyche in ivory and gold, for despite the lateness of the season she was dressed in white from the crown of her perfect little head to the soles of her equally perfect little feet, rough white serge and white fox furs—an eccentricity that cost her mother half her meagre income, but which was more than justified in the eyes of the casual beholder. As usual the male element among the passengers paid a gratifying tribute to her charms, and though she was used enough to the mild sensation her appearance invariably provoked, she was no more weary of it than she was of looking in her glass. Even a whispered argument between two very young men as to whether she was "the kind you speak to" did not displease her. Their obviously ardent wish to approach her was

an apology in itself. Poor boys. Of course it would not even do to let them see she noticed them.

She left the train rather regretfully and walked up the street to the door of a woman's club.

"Is Miss Towers in?" she asked the porter. "No? Oh well, it's all right. I'll wait for her, she's expecting me."

The porter looked dubious, but showed her into a reception-room which contained a coke fire, a week-old copy of the *Financial Times,* and a dusty writing-table.

Corisande went straight to the fire and taking the crumpled letter from her pocket thrust it into the hottest part of the coals, prodding it in with the poker till it blazed beyond all danger of extinction. This done she sat down at the writing-table and studied the defects of the two pens it offered her. Choosing the one that was most corroded but boasted of both prongs, she wrote:

"Darling Maurice," and then paused to draw circles on the blotting paper. She completed a row of ten very neatly and then turned to her letter again. "I've been thinking that it's time this silly joke about our being engaged came to an end.

Don't you? You see I'm grown up now, nearly nineteen, and mother says I must be serious and not rag about like I used to when I was a kid." Another halt to read over what she had written. It wasn't quite what she had meant to say, but she thought it would do. If you wanted a thing out of the way it helped a lot to assume that it had never existed. Her eye fell on her engagement ring, a large square sapphire set in small diamonds. She transferred it to her right hand and surveyed it with affection. The stone might have been darker, she reflected, but all the same it made her fingers look very white. Ought she to say anything about it? She believed people gave back engagement rings when they broke off engagements, but then, she asked herself seriously, had it ever really been an engagement? Her letter proved that she had never considered it in that light. If it were not an engagement, what was the difference between the ring and the watch-bracelet Jackie had simply forced on her, or the gold chain bag she had been compelled to accept from somebody else? Her mother was inclined to be stuffy about these things sometimes, but even she was beginning to realize that the old nonsense about men and women not being friends was over and done with. No, it

would be just like a silly Victorian Miss to go sending back her ring. She would keep it to remember dear Maurice by. She sighed sentimentally. He *had* been rather nice sometimes, especially those first days.

Patch Reval had asked her down to Revals Langley just before poor Jack Reval died. Maurice was there, fresh from two years in Mesopotamia. She remembered how he had changed colour and stared at her when she had come into the hall where they were all at tea. Patch had had to yell at him before he answered her and then he had said something so stupid that everybody had laughed. Corisande had been pleasantly fluttered though she would have preferred it if Archie had been the victim. He was not nearly so good-looking to be sure, but then he was in the Guards instead of the Indian Cavalry, and would be a baronet when the old General died. But Archie had already fallen to the bow and spear of a florid grass widow with tomato-coloured hair, and Corisande to show she didn't care allowed herself to be made love to in a dumb, breathless fashion by Maurice. It was rather fun, especially after she discovered she could make him really angry and miserable by flirting with two or three of Patch's "little boys"—callow

youths with sticky hands and high-pitched laughs, culled from the neighbouring university.

For a day or two she had amused herself by seeing how much he would stand, and then, after a prolonged study of his photograph in full uniform, and hearing Patch say that his family were determined he should marry a girl with money, she suddenly decided to conclude matters.

It was strictly according to plan, therefore, that Maurice, in a mood of wide tolerance induced by a good day's hunting on a superlatively good horse, should have come upon her unexpectedly in a little larch wood, as he rode home through the Spring twilight. She was standing with her back against a dark evergreen, her eyes turned towards the primrose sky. As usual she was in white, her red-gold hair puffing out under her white fur cap. So absorbed did she seem that she only came to earth with an effort when Maurice was off his horse and standing before her.

"Did you come to meet me?" he asked huskily.

Corisande looked up at him, her mouth drooping as if a very little would make her cry. They had had something like a quarrel the night before, or rather she had quarrelled and he had sulked.

"You aren't going to be cross with me again,

are you?" There was a little catch in her voice which was really due to excitement but made the infatuated Maurice feel utterly abased. For five or six minutes she played him like a salmon, and then as her feet were getting cold, she gave in gracefully. What followed was deliciously exhilarating if rather bewildering. She wondered if the wing in her hat had suffered much, and found to her intense annoyance that the horse, availing himself of the general abstraction, had snuffed all down her sleeve.

Heigho! Would anything like it be quite the same again? She shut her eyes, smiling, as the colour rose slowly in her cheeks. How he had worshipped her! For a moment she looked doubtfully at her letter. His adoration of her beauty had always intoxicated her. It was that she would miss, and now he would never be able to see her again. For the first time she came a little nearer to realizing what total blindness might mean. Poor, *poor* darling. But it only made it all the more impossible. She was perfectly hopeless with sick people. She knew it. It was much better to recognize one's own defects. Besides, if he couldn't see her, what good would it do to be with him?

No, she was doing what was best and kindest

for both of them. She put her pen firmly in the ink once more and wrote rapidly: "I shall always wear that ring you gave me, because you are the best friend I have, and I love to have something to remember you by when you are so far away. I wonder when you'll get leave again and if I shall be in town. Perhaps I shall, perhaps I shan't.

Good luck and a good time.

Yours, CORISANDE."

She wrote his name, Captain M. L. Bannister, on an envelope, and then hesitated. Suppose they were sending him home and he didn't get it before he left? She put it in another envelope and addressed it to Mrs. Reval with a line saying that she had mislaid his last letter and was not sure where he was, would Patch forward it at once?

Then, with a deep sigh as if a heavy burden had been disposed of, she took another sheet of paper, and crossing out the club address wrote her own.

"Dear Mr. van Housen," she began, excitement dawning in her eyes, "you simply took my breath away! Why you only saw me for the first time to-day, and you say I must send you an answer to-night! I think we must have known each other

in some former state" (this was an inspiration, toning down what might have seemed unduly abrupt); "at least I can't help feeling this is so. Come and see me to-morrow at eleven.

CORISANDE."

With a little skill she could still keep in with Patch Reval she said to herself as she licked the flap of the envelope, and after all was that so very important? Might she not in certain circumstances be in a position to flout Patch? In the end it was money that really counted.

Chapter II

ON the outskirts of the market town of Crampton, there stands a large country house, which served as a hospital during the war, and failing other purposes, had survived the general demobilization of such establishments as a convalescent pendant to the permanent Naval and Military Hospitals, for such sick officers as lacked homes in England, or needed more treatment than was feasible in many of them.

It was there that Maurice Bannister had been taken on his arrival in England, rather than to his own home in Cumberland which was too far from the doctors, and there that he now lay in one of the narrow white beds in an upstairs room.

There were three other beds besides his, each with a little table beside it, bearing that jackdaw's treasure of small objects which usually adorns a man's dressing-table. On one or two of them there were women's photographs, and on a third a child's. On all were cigarettes and old battered pipes. Books too, and illustrated magazines. Only on

one table there were no picture papers and no photographs, because neither would have been of any use to the man who couldn't see.

He lay so very still that he seemed to be asleep, though whether he was or not was difficult to say, for the upper part of his face was entirely covered by bandages, which left only his sharply arched nostrils, and full-lipped mouth, with a clipped black moustache, visible.

Presently there was a sound of footsteps, halting outside the door. A quiver ran through the still figure on the bed. He had not been asleep, but listening very intently. As the door opened he turned his head sharply.

"He'll be glad you've come," reached him in a nurse's cheerful voice. "It's dull for him when the others go downstairs, and they won't be up for an hour or more. Are you asleep, Captain Bannister?"

The tense expectancy died out of the pose of his head and his whole body relaxed.

"It's Mrs. Cassilis, isn't it?" he asked indifferently.

A tall, thin woman, in old-fashioned, rather shabby clothes came towards the bed, and sat down on a chair which the nurse placed for her.

"What can I do for you this afternoon. Shall I read? Or are there letters you want me to write?" She spoke gently, but as one for whom the person she addresses has no special identity.

Captain Bannister did not answer immediately. He lay with his head turned away as if he had not heard her. The nurse bustled about the hearth, making up the fire. Mrs. Cassilis took off her heavy coat and folded her hands in her lap. She looked like a delicate old-fashioned water-colour, which had been partly washed out. There were tiny lines round her mouth and eyes, but though her neck and chin were very thin they showed no signs of sagging muscles, in contradiction to her wide set grey eyes which had lost all the look of expectation that constitutes youth, and her soft fair hair which appeared dull and faded where it showed under her unbecoming hat. But she must have been a pretty girl, most people would have said, and then have felt astonished to hear she was barely thirty.

Her eyes rested calmly on the man in the bed. She was thinking, not for the first time, that he was like Zurbaran's picture of the Spanish monk. The mouth and chin were curiously like, and so were the hands that lay on the counterpane—strong,

brown and nervous, like a monk's hands holding the skull, which looked as if they had once known more formidable employment. She had tried to copy the picture, some years before, and had been rather pleased with the results of her effort.

Where was it now, by the way? Gone in the sale most likely, like everything else, the sale that had been a welcome bonfire into which she could fling every tangible token of her life with poor Edward.

She wished she had kept the little picture, though.

But what did it matter? Nothing mattered.

She had never lived, and now she was dead. Too dead even to feel sorry for herself.

A movement from the man in the bed recalled her thoughts. He was feeling under the pillow for something, and presently pulled out a little brown leather pocket-book. Three unopened letters fell out. Mrs. Cassilis had time to see that they were all in the same handwriting before the groping fingers found them and gathered them together. Beneath the edge of the bandage and right down to the collar of his pyjama jacket, a dark flush had spread itself, and he was breathing rather quickly.

"I wonder," he began, with a little jerk in his voice, "if you would be awfully good and read some

letters to me? They came after I was knocked over, and they're rather private. I'm afraid I shan't be able to read them myself for some time. I—I should like to know what's in them, and you've been so awfully good to me, perhaps you wouldn't mind."

Mrs. Cassilis took them from him.

"Shall I read them in the order of their dates?"

"Yes, please."

The thin fingers were twitching and fidgeting with the sheet. She put a cigarette-case into them, and when he was ready for it, struck a match. Then in the same deliberate, impersonal way she opened the first letter and began to read.

"Darling old Maurice. What an age it is since I wrote to you, but you mustn't be cross, because I've had such heaps to do." There followed a long account of dances, dinners, and lunches, all with different, but apparently equally infatuated, admirers. A silly not to say vulgar little letter, such as the reader supposed silly little girls were in the habit of writing to good-looking men. Was this one engaged to Captain Bannister? He certainly seemed to feel a good deal about her, but her point of view was not so clear. "So I changed my ring on to my right hand, and that night he

actually proposed to me. Romantic garden, moonlight, and soft music. My dear, he nearly wept when I murmured the tragic truth. I *shrieked* and so did Patch, and of course he left next morning, 'dog-cart at eight,' and all that." Mrs. Cassilis glanced towards the bed. That sort of man. . . . It seemed a pity. He was lying quiet and contented, a little smile playing about his lips. Perhaps he knew how much it all amounted to. She went on to the second letter which was in the same strain.

It was three weeks now since Maurice Bannister had arrived in England, and every day he had expected that Corisande would come, but so far she had given no sign except this note that Patch had brought down, which she said had reached her the day after the news came that he was hurt. She had not forwarded it as Corisande had asked her to, for fear it might miss him. Should she read it? No, he would rather keep it and Corisande should read it to him herself. When did Patch think she would come? Mrs. Reval had answered vaguely and shortly. She hadn't seen Corisande, which seemed strange. She would come again as soon as she could, but darling Maurice must realize how fearfully rushed she was.

She hardly had time to see a soul. Their father, too, was worrying her life out about Archie, who as usual was making every kind of fool of himself with a perfectly impossible woman: she simply had to try and keep her eye on him. Maurice must hurry up and get well enough to be moved to Curzon Street, and she would get in some really nice girls to amuse him. With which she had kissed him affectionately and departed.

Since then he had had no visitors unless you could count this Mrs. Cassilis, who came to the hospital every afternoon to read, write letters, and do odd jobs for the patients. He liked to have her there, she was quieter than the nurses—so quiet that he often forgot she was in the room. Her voice soothed his jarred nerves—besides, she always seemed to know what he wanted, and what was more, what he didn't want, without putting him to the trouble of saying so. She was such a shadow, so aloof from ordinary life, that he felt he could let her read Corrie's letters without feeling that a third person was coming between them, and to-day it had seemed to him that he couldn't wait any longer. Corrie would come; of course she would. Probably her mother was making some silly fuss about her coming alone, and hadn't time to bring

her herself. If it wasn't to-day, it would be to-morrow. This note would probably explain everything. He waited eagerly for the opening of the third envelope. . . . What was that?

"I've been thinking that it's about time this silly joke of our being engaged came to an end." Mrs. Cassilis dropped the letter with a little gasp.

"Go on, go on," said Maurice hoarsely. The buzzing in his ears almost deafened him. She steadied her voice as well as she could and read firmly to the end, feeling that to drive in the knife quickly was the most merciful course.

"Thank you," he said between shut teeth, as she finished. "Thank you, I—I think that's all."

She guessed that more than anything he wanted her to go away at once without speaking. Without waiting to put on her coat, she went quietly out of the room, her eyes full of unwonted tears and her pale lips trembling.

Chapter III

NEXT morning's wintry sun, peering in at the dining-room window of Morley Edge with the dubious cheerfulness of a red nose, found the Morland family assembled for the prayers that always preceded breakfast. From the passage behind the second door came a subdued crackling of starched print, indicating that the maidservants only awaited the summons of the bell. Inside the room everybody was in their places except Rachel Cassilis. On one side of the fireplace sat Enid Morland with her feet crossed. She was frowning at the buckle on her uppermost shoe which needed sewing. The housemaid had forgotten to do it again, and it would end in Enid having to take time from her practising to do it herself. When she had a house of her own she would take care that the servants were not so slack. Her mother spoilt them, and they did their work no better in consequence.

Mrs. Morland was in her chair at the head of the table, but pushed back from it so as to signify

that her immediate purpose was not food. She fixed a threatening eye on the kettle which was gurgling to itself, and had a trick of unfairly, and as she felt irreverently, boiling over as soon as she turned her back to it.

In the bow-window stood Mr. Morland, with his face to a small dining-room lectern and his back to the thrushes on the lawn. He was alternately fidgeting with his book-markers and glaring over his eyeglasses at the door.

The whole room was suffused with an inviting aroma of sausages and bacon.

"Rachel not coming down?" Mr. Morland snapped at Enid.

Enid assumed that expression of peculiar sweetness she invariably wore when saying how she loathed getting other people into trouble.

"She was only just dressing when I came down. I offered to stay and help her instead of going for my run round the garden. I know how it vexes you when she is late, but she seemed to want to get rid of me. I expect she's been reading some of those dozens of French novels she has, and has overslept herself."

Mrs. Morland sighed.

"I do wish she were more settled," she re-

marked, apparently to the kettle. "I was talking about it to Violet, and she was saying that she never thought Rachel started off with any kind of home life in view. It's a great mistake when young people don't. That living in London now, and knowing all those people, they may have been very grand and amusing, but she would have done much better to have settled down here as Violet did."

Mr. Morland snapped the case of his watch.

"I can't wait for her any longer," he growled. "Ring the bell, Enid."

The five maidservants filed into the room headed by the cook and seated themselves on five chairs, placed with their backs against the sideboard. Mrs. Morland turned the wick of the kettle a little lower, and arranged her plump features in an expression of blank detachment, as her husband cleared his throat and proceeded to deliver his instructions to the Almighty for the ensuing day, in a loud hectoring voice.

Ten minutes later, the concluding amen was reached, and as the servants left the room, Rachel entered it. She looked much younger without a hat, but worn and fragile as if she had recently had a severe illness. The dark circles under her eyes

were more pronounced than usual, and in reply to her aunt's inquiry she admitted that she had a headache.

"You'd be perfectly well if you didn't read so much," said Enid briskly. "I can do a good day's work and laugh and joke at the end of it. I'm sure it's because I get up early enough and go for a good run round the garden. I shall call you to-morrow and drag you out whether you want to come or not."

Rachel made no reply. She was making up her mind that she would not go near Captain Bannister again unless he asked for her. After yesterday it seemed unlikely that he would. She was sorry. It was a long time since she was conscious of having a feeling one way or another about anything, but now that they were over she was aware that the hours she had spent with him had been soothing and peaceful. He was so considerate, so grateful for little things. Besides there was something strangely appealing about him, not only his blindness, there were other blind men in the hospital. She thought he must have been a very dear little boy, and wondered what sort of a mother he had had. Like most people she was fairly familiar with the careers of Mrs. Reval and Major Bannister, through the

medium of an enlightened Press, and was mildly surprised to find that this man was their brother.

Mrs. Morland and Enid bore the burden of the conversation, as the head of the house had disappeared behind the *Daily Mail*. They read their letters aloud to each other and discussed the writers in terms of mild disparagement.

Enid Morland stood five feet eight in her stockings and took seven in shoes and gloves. Her straight corn-coloured hair was vigorously brushed back from her pink healthy face and clubbed together at the nape of her neck. She could drive a golf ball further than any other girl in Crampton, and was the only cyclist, male or female, except the errand boys, who could ride up the station hill without getting off. Being quite sure about everything life presented her with few problems. It was all simple enough if one did what was right, which in Enid's case consisted in performing agreeable tasks with an appearance of self-sacrifice and rejecting others as against common sense. She gave her family a feeling of the most complete security that she would never allow anything tiresome to happen to her, in return for which they were ready enough to accept her at her own valuation.

She had recently become engaged to a young man whose father had left him five thousand a year and a partnership in one of the oldest businesses in Hollingham. Letters of congratulation were now pouring in, from which she read aloud all the passages relating to Tom Willson's extraordinary good fortune.

In the intervals of listening to Enid, Mrs. Morland was trying to see who Rachel's letters were from, without appearing to be looking. Ever since things had gone wrong with the Cassilis she had been in a state of perpetual apprehension that something not at all nice would crop up. Rachel had had foreign up-bringing which made one uncomfortable, and then seeing her name at one time in the papers at parties. She supposed it was because she had married a barrister whose calling, though admittedly lucrative and therefore respectable, was bound to be uncomfortably public. It was all against their own traditions. She could never put her fears into so many words, but she felt an anxious curiosity about any of her niece's affairs which she could not see right through to the back. As, however, in the present case the envelopes revealed nothing, she was at length obliged to say brightly:

"Anything interesting for you this morning, Rachel? It's nice to hear everybody's news. The girls always read their letters aloud."

Rachel turned over the little heap by her plate.

"A receipted bill, the invoice from the place where my trunks are stored, and the report from the asylum. Shall I read that?" she added with a sudden gust of irritation.

Mr. Morland glanced over his shoulder to see if there were any servants in the room. It was generally understood that Edward Cassilis was having a rest cure. Really Rachel seemed to take a delight in making things as difficult for them all as she could.

"No, no——" exclaimed her aunt. "Yes, that is, of course, we want to hear how poor dear Edward is. Just give it us shortly."

"His health is much improved. His weight has increased. He has had no lucid interval so far, and they have had to put another man on to watch him."

Poor Mrs. Morland really didn't quite know what to say for the best, so she changed the subject rapidly, and yet as she felt not unkindly by exclaiming dramatically:

"Enid! *Did* you hear me tell Jevons about or-

dering the sweetbreads for to-night? If I didn't we shall never get them in time."

"Yes, you did," her daughter assured her. "Don't you remember I turned back when I was going to town to remind you?"

"I thought you had forgotten your umbrella," Rachel was unable to resist suggesting. But it passed unnoticed.

"So you did, dear," assented Mrs. Morland. "I remember how kind you were. I *am* thankful."

Mr. Morland folded up the *Daily Mail,* put away his eyeglasses, sucked his moustache, and rose from his chair.

"Don't forget to tell Gubbins the drive wants weeding," he called to his wife over his shoulder, as he left the room. Mrs. Morland ran after him, and before long the car was heard setting forth with its owner in good time to catch the 9.35 for Hollingham.

Mrs. Morland returned from the doorstep and sat down by the morning-room fire for ten minutes' perusal of yesterday's paper before going to see her cook. But instead of reading the recipes in the section devoted to matters of domestic interest she was thinking to herself that Rachel's visit had really lasted quite long enough, especially if she would

persist in talking about her husband's illness in that heartless way just when anyone might hear her. It was all chance and nothing else that Mary had not come into the room that very moment to say that the car was round. She ought to be thankful that they had been more or less successful in hushing the whole thing up. If Edward had really injured her as she persisted in thinking he meant to, it would have got into the papers, and been perfectly awful for them all. Why the Willsons might even have tried to break off the engagement. She had cautioned Enid that while it might be right to have no secret from her future husband, she needn't feel obliged to tell Tom that any one connected with them (only by marriage, of course) was in an asylum. There was no need to call it anything but a nervous breakdown if Rachel would only see it in a proper light. And then, too, she might smarten herself up a bit, and look more cheerful, but when she had tried to give her a little hint about her clothes she had replied that as nearly all her income went to pay Edward's charges she couldn't afford any new ones, and as Mrs. Morland had felt that to buy her any herself would be absurd, the matter had hung fire. One would have thought she would have made some effort if it

was only for the sake of a dear good unselfish girl like Enid, who was so happy just now.

Rachel was very likely jealous, feeling that she had made such a mess of things herself, while both her cousins had done so well. Violet with a very nice house and a motor of her own, to say nothing of four dear little children, and Enid just about to enter a similar and even better furnished paradise. Now that the war was over and everything getting so much more comfortable again, everything would have been as pleasant as possible if only Rachel hadn't come trailing her tragic figure across their sunny paths. Friends were always asking tiresome questions, and commenting on her miserable appearance. Why couldn't she pull herself together and look more like other people? It wasn't as if poor Edward had died. He would very likely get better, and then it would all be all right again.

Mrs. Morland's indignation grew as she felt how selfishly Rachel was behaving to them all. Her inconsiderateness was probably at the bottom of poor Edward's illness. It was no use asking them to be very sympathetic about what was so evidently her own fault.

The sound of the front door shutting made her turn and look out of the window. There was

Rachel hurrying down the drive, on some errand in connection with the Convalescent Home, probably, instead of staying and helping Enid with the flowers. It was all ridiculous nonsense now the war was over, but she always put others before her own family.

Chapter IV

IN the afternoon Rachel went as usual to the Home. It was still supported by, and mainly under the direction of, the lady who owned the house and had run it as a hospital during the war. Miss Crosse had known and liked Rachel when she had come to live at Crampton after her parents' deaths and before her marriage, and meeting her one day after her recent return, listless and unoccupied, had suggested that she should come and help her with her correspondence, and put in such time as remained in reading to the patients, mending their clothes, and writing letters for such as were unable to do so for themselves. Rachel who had gladly seized the chance of real occupation and an escape from her aunt and cousin's exhausting society, had quickly fitted herself into the machinery of the establishment. She was always courteous and friendly to the nurses, showed no disposition to flirt with the patients, or for that matter they with her, and saved the overworked staff in fifty different ways a day.

This afternoon she was immediately in request

to write a letter for a man with an injured hand, in reply to a communication from his tailor, enclosing a number of little patterns of lounge suitings. It was a lengthy business, as Mr. Shaw's five best friends also assisted. They had five different choices among the patterns, and Mr. Shaw showed a disposition to follow each in turn. Nor was it easy to keep them to the matter in hand, as they were all bubbling over with the success of a particularly subtle booby trap, set to ensnare the nightnurse when she came on duty the night before.

Rachel wrote and rewrote the letter four times over, and was then confronted by the despondent statement that Mr. Shaw didn't think he liked any of the stuffs, and that they were a beastly price anyhow. He thought he had better sleep on it, and then if he felt the same to-morrow, he would ask her to write for more patterns.

She went on to a stout R.E. Major who had lost both legs in the war and was now losing his temper with his bead work.

"Blast the thing," he said. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Cassilis, but the damned string goes into knots of itself, and none of the little swine have any holes in them. Confound my needle. It's gone again."

Rachel was still sorting out the beads that had been perforated from those which hadn't, when the time came for her to return home. There had been no message for her to go to Captain Bannister. He was not so well, his nurse said, and Rachel did not venture to ask more. She felt much more tired than usual, and was shocked to find herself getting impatient even with poor old Major Armstrong. But surely he had never been quite so wearisome before?

At last after a week had passed and she had heard nothing, she came to the conclusion that her first impression had been right and that Captain Bannister had no further use for her services. Of course it was nothing to her, as she kept reminding herself. It was only that she was so horribly sorry for him, and couldn't help feeling that the blow had been delivered through her, and that he must hate her for having had anything to do with it. The thought of it haunted her perpetually and often kept her awake at night. She supposed it was because she had suffered so much herself that she couldn't bear to feel that she had even unconsciously hurt anybody else. Finally she discovered that she would not mind nearly so much if she only knew that he had forgiven her for it.

Her thoughts were running in this strain one afternoon, when at last a nurse came to her with a message that he had asked for her.

"He wanted you yesterday, but I couldn't find you," she remarked casually.

Rachel felt all her colour rush into her face.

"I was only helping Major Armstrong with his beads, and he doesn't really need me," she said, rather indignantly.

"Can't have seen you then, not behind him," laughed the nurse. "Truth was I'd had enough of running up and down stairs, so I just told him you was busy." She laughed again and then added more soberly, "He's been awfully dull and quiet these last days."

Rachel was speechless. Nor could she at all understand her own wrath, which seemed out of all proportion to the offence. Her heart beat suffocatingly as she went upstairs. Now it came to the point she almost wished he hadn't sent for her. How would he greet her? Would he make any allusion to last time? She stood still for a minute outside the door to regain her breath. He couldn't see her so she ought to be able to behave perfectly naturally.

He was lying just as he always lay, but to-day

there was a weariness, a relaxation of all his muscles, that she noticed at once. His face, as much as she could see of it, looked thinner.

This time there was no eager turning of his head. His visitor understood it now. He seemed unconscious of her presence until she stood beside him. She stooped to pick up some matches that had fallen on the floor, and began to replace them in a box trying to think of something to say.

"It's very good of you, Mrs. Cassilis," he said at last. His voice had a weary sound, and he paused as if he had forgotten what he was going to say next. There was no dislike in his tone, Rachel thought, only utter indifference. She saw that she had been no more in the matter than the paper on which the letter had been written.

"I'm sorry so to drag you up here," he went on. "I hoped my sister would have come to-day, and then I shouldn't have had to bother you."

"What is it? Nothing is any trouble. I come here to do anything I can for any of you." She tried to make her voice sound as indifferent as his, but her hearer must have noticed a little shake in it, for he said rather hurriedly:

"It's only a business letter. You'll find it somewhere on the table. I expect its got 'Moss and

Wheatly' printed on the envelope. Would you mind reading it to me and then writing the answer?"

Rachel obeyed. It was a letter from a firm of solicitors informing their client that, in pursuance of his instructions, they had given due notice to the occupants of the house at Little Morton known as Greyladies that they must leave at the termination of their lease at the March quarter, as Captain Bannister intended to occupy the mansion himself. When she reached the end she took up a writing-pad and waited, but for a long time Maurice lay silent.

"It's a dear old place," he murmured presently, almost as if to himself. "It belonged to my mother's people. Not big, you know, or anything out of the way. The others think it's a frightful barn because there's no light except lamps and candles, and only one bathroom. Also I suppose it *is* a bit damp. It used to be a convent before the Reformation—that's why it's called Greyladies. They say some of the nuns haunt it still. I don't know . . . I used to go down there for my holidays when I was a little chap, and stay with the housekeeper, who was full of every sort of yarn. *She* believed in the nuns all right—used to tell me they'd be

angry if I made a mess of their fruit trees. . . . There's a little brown stream I used to fish in, and a garden full of lavender bushes and those tall white lilies, stacks of them. They say they've always been there. Some one tried to get rid of them once. I don't know why, but they came up again, more of them than ever next Spring."

"Yes?" said Rachel softly as he paused. "Tell me more."

"I don't know that there's much more to tell. The rooms are panelled with some sort of dark wood, and in some of them there is a lot of old faded tapestry. They tell me it's good, I don't know anything about it except that some of it is pretty ragged, but the colours are jolly. There's not much furniture and I'm afraid that what there is is pretty worm-eaten. None of the chairs are very safe. Patch and Archie never could stand the place, even when they were kids, but I would rather it was mine than Watersmeeting. You know how there are some places you care an awful lot about without exactly knowing why. But Patch was right, we couldn't have lived in it without any amount of doing up."

His tone had changed and he stopped abruptly.

"I was forgetting all about the letter," he went

on in the rather formal way he usually spoke to her. "Will you please tell them that I shan't want the house after all."

Rachel wrote the letter and read it over to him.

"You might just add that I've changed my mind about making a new will," he said jerkily as she came to the end. The colour was hot under his dark skin and she noticed that his face twitched slightly. She wondered if something should not be said about the settlements which had probably been under consideration, but she could not bring herself to do it and hoped the lawyers would observe a similar reticence. She added the paragraph about the will, and then putting the pen in his hand guided it to the place for the signature. When it was done he lay back with a little sigh that sounded like relief.

"You're not in a hurry?" he asked.

"No, not a bit. Shall I read?"

"I'd rather talk, if you don't mind. Somehow my brain's gone all woolly lately, and I can't follow a book for long. I've been yarning about Grey-ladies, so it's your turn now. Tell me where you live. . . . Do you mind?"

For Rachel seemed to hesitate. Did he *really* want to know?

"Of course not," she replied lightly, "only it's all very dull. I live with an uncle and aunt and their unmarried daughter. Their house, which is called Morley Edge, is very new, very clean, and very red. It has all the latest improvements. The furniture is all very new too, and every room is conscientiously furnished in a different style. The dining-room is Jacobean and the drawing-room Louis-Seize—just like those sort of loose-boxes arranged in different periods that you see in the windows of big furniture shops. In the garden there is everything there should be, very well controlled. Nothing sticks out too far, or gets on top of the next thing, and of course there are no weeds. Even the roses are educated to climb up and down poles and creep along chains without getting untidy. Then there is a large kitchen garden which produced the finest kinds of everything, and a drive which is at least two-thirds longer than it need be, I suppose for fear you should come on the house before Aunt Minna has had time to say she isn't at home."

Maurice smiled cryptically.

"I believe you'd love Greyladies," he said. "Now tell me about the people."

Rachel told herself that she really did mean to

be perfectly loyal to her family, but she desperately wanted to amuse and interest him.

"Well, first of all, my uncle's name is John Morland. He is the senior partner in Henry Morland and Sons, who make iron things in Hollingham. He is short and stout and reads the lessons in church. The *Daily Mail* does all his thinking for him, and Aunt Minna all his talking. She, Aunt Minna, is an excellent manager. Her servants never leave her and her parties are much more successful than anybody else's. She is very carefully and handsomely upholstered by a big shop in Hollingham, thinks it's rather fast to get one's clothes in London, and that Paris frocks are the livery of Satan."

"*Do* go on," urged Maurice, laughing weakly.

"Then there's Enid, the unmarried daughter, who is very like what Aunt Minna must have been at the same age. She is also very clever, and never makes mistakes. She is going to be married next month to a young man called Tom Willson. He was in the 12th Hollinghamshires during the war. I believe Enid nursed him when he was wounded —he still looks more washed than most people."

"Poor devil," interjected Maurice. "I believe I ran across him in Basra. The 12th Hollybushes

were there for a bit. He wasn't a bad chap, as far as I can remember. New Army, you know."

"No, he isn't at all bad, and three years' soldiering smartened him up, and gave him a few ideas beyond business and Hollingham. Even now he hasn't quite got back the creased look, as if he'd slept in his clothes—that his brothers have. But after a year or two of Enid's good management, I'm afraid he'll be just as stupified with food and comfort as Harold Greenwood."

"Who's he?"

"Violet's husband. Violet is Enid's married sister. They live at a house called Athenley, a little further up the Hollingham Road. It's exactly like Morley Edge, only not quite so big. Violet is great on old furniture. I never really grasped the scope of faith till I saw her belief in her antiques. She has four children, whose conversation no one is ever allowed to interrupt, and whose sayings together with what the servants do or don't do, furnish most of our talk at family dinners—which reminds me there is one to-night," she broke off in a panic, as her eye met her watch.

She had completely forgotten the hour, and now would have to run the best part of the way home if she were to be back in time.

Maurice was obviously disinclined to let her go.

"Do come to me first to-morrow," he said as he held her hand. "You can put somebody else on to see old Armstrong doesn't swallow his beads."

Mrs. Cassilis was coming out in a new light. He wondered if she was quite as old as he had at first imagined. She spoke of an uncle and aunt as if they were quite able-bodied—not that that was anything to go by; generations often overlapped in the collateral branches. It must be pretty rotten for her though, living with such awful people.

Rachel hurried home feeling absurdly elated. It was the first time he had seemed to care whether she came or not.

Chapter V

THE Morland family dinners took place with the utmost regularity once a week. Before Rachel's arrival they had been a compact little party of six, including Harold, Violet, and Tom Willson. But now the table either looked lop-sided or they were obliged to ask the bachelor vicar, who, though they had known him for twenty years, they still felt was an outsider.

To-night the vicar had sent a note to the effect that he was down with influenza, which, Mrs. Morland felt, showed very little sense of all that Mr. Morland had done for him. It was too late to get anyone else even if she had been able to think of some one who was free enough of family ties to come alone, and yet on a sufficiently familiar footing at Morley Edge to be privileged to witness the mysteries of Enid and Tom's courtship.

"We can't ask a total stranger," she said plaintively to her husband. She was sitting on a chair which was much too small for her, talking to him while he dressed for dinner. She always dressed

early herself, so as to have this time to pour out an account of the day's triumphs or catastrophes, when he could not very well escape from her, or pretend to be asleep.

"We can't ask strangers in. Enid and Tom can't go off to the billiard-room if we do, and it's so disappointing for them in the only time they get together, except Saturdays and Sundays. If Rachel were not here, they could go, and we could have our four of bridge without the table being all crooked. . . ."

"How long does Rachel mean to stop?" interrupted Mr. Morland, struggling with the stud at the back of his collar. He never attempted to follow in the devious path of his wife's reflections but took short cuts, catching her up as she passed a salient point.

Mrs. Morland shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know. I never asked her. I didn't like to. One is very sorry for her of course, though I can't help feeling more and more that it must have been a great deal her own fault. She doesn't seem to have any idea what a regular well-ordered life should be, though I'm sure I did my best to teach her when she was a girl. What she will do now, I can't think. Perhaps she will go

away for a bit and then come back and help me with the wedding."

"You'd better get it settled as soon as you can," grunted Mr. Morland as he shook himself into his coat. "And look here. I won't have any talk of any woman in my family earning her own living; mind you make her understand that. She'd better see if she can't find some elderly sensible woman to share a small house with her. If she's careful she can make do on that three hundred she's got left, but there won't be any margin for Paris bonnets, tell her. I've done all I can for her seeing the lawyers don't cheat her, and knocking fifty pounds off Edward's keep, and a fine talk I had with the doctor fellow to get that much. Took me the best part of an hour's arguing. I can't do any more for her. We've got our own girls to look after."

"Yes, indeed," echoed his wife seriously.

"Harold and Tom are both doing well, I'm glad to say." Mr. Morland went on glaring at his own reflection in the glass. "And I've not done as badly as some, but Lord knows where next year mayn't land us, and we must think of the children."

"You're a good father, John," murmured Mrs. Morland, touched almost to tears. "You always put the children first. Rachel was well provided

for by her own parents. I'm very sorry for her, but I'm sure we've done a great deal more for her than most people would have done. I shall always be pleased to see her whenever she likes to come, but I quite see it won't do to let it get into a settled arrangement again. I always felt it was hard on Enid, when she lived here before she was married, and now it's dreadful to see her looking so ill and going about in those shabby clothes. Even Mrs. Willson remarked on it."

"Well, we've had her here for two months, and no one can say we haven't done what we could for her. But two months is long enough and it's time there was a change. She's never in time for prayers, and she's got a way of looking at things I don't like. So you just put it to her so that she understands."

Mr. Morland thrust his clean handkerchief into his pocket and stamped out of the room.

His wife stayed behind, collecting odds and ends of clothing and putting them together. She moved about quietly and methodically, looking at each button in turn and giving it a little tug. Then she straightened the row of photographs of herself and her children and grandchildren, on the dressing-table, and finally picking up one of the ivory-backed

brushes noticed that it would soon need fresh bristles. She carried it through into her bedroom, putting it on her table where she would be sure to see it and remember to take it with her when she went into Hollingham the next day. Then having performed one of the most important duties of her life, her brow relaxed and she went downstairs.

She was very glad indeed her husband felt as she did about Rachel. She was his niece, not hers, which might have made it awkward if it had looked too much as if she, Mrs. Morland, were trying to get rid of her. But he had relieved her of all responsibility by saying most definitely exactly what she wanted him to say.

More than one thing had happened during the day to make it imperative the girl should go. In the morning she had met Mrs. Willson who had first made some tiresome interfering suggestions about the wedding and then asked after Edward in a very queer way, as if she didn't believe Mrs. Morland was speaking the truth. At which Mrs. Morland had lost her temper a little, and said rather flurriedly that there was nothing out of the way in a nervous breakdown. And Mrs. Willson had also lost a little of hers, and replied that of course there wasn't, and that she had always said it wasn't true

that the Cassilis were *separated.* Mrs. Morland hardly knew how she got away from her. She had been obliged to go into the confectioner's and ask for a glass of water. Never, never had she thought of people saying *that.* It almost seemed as if it was no use trying to keep things quiet, if they were positively going to *invent.* She had been all the more upset by it as she could say nothing about it to her husband. He didn't like Mrs. Willson at the best of times, and it wouldn't do to have any disagreeables just before the wedding. No, Rachel must go, and as soon as possible; if she stayed on here they would all be involved in some horrible scandal.

Meanwhile Rachel had returned from the Home in a frame of mind she had not known for many a long day. She brushed her pale hair till it shone, and arranged it in a new way. A distaste for the well-worn black dress that lay on the bed sent her to the wardrobe in search of a misty blue-grey chiffon, the last piece of finery she had bought in the days when she still wore such things. Her pearls, too, why not wear them sometimes? They would lose their colour if she didn't. She lifted them from their case, and let their round milky shapes run through her fingers. They had been

her mother's, and had had nothing to do with Edward. Her uncle had said she had better sell them, and she had almost acquiesced. It might be sensible, but then she had so few good things. Edward had never been in the habit of giving her presents—she was thankful for that—and it had not occurred to her to buy such things for herself. After all she didn't want the money so very badly, and if she went anywhere. . . . Suddenly it struck her that she was counting on a time coming when she would again care what she looked like. Her face clouded over and she blushed painfully.

No, that sort of thing was all over and done with, even the very little she had ever had. For on looking back at her life it did not strike her that it had ever been particularly joyous. A few dances at Crampton partnered by speechless young men with sticky hands. A few dinners in London when, if she had been a success, Edward had complained that she talked too much, and if she were silent that she did nothing to help him. And now her youth gone, her looks gone—well, very nearly—she was face to face with a future in which she must play the anomalous part of a perfectly respectable woman who was neither married nor single. An uncomfortable problem to her family and to society in

general, there seemed no place for her any more than there was any proper designation.

With the blue dress half-way over her head, she stopped and took it off again. But something in the deepest fibres of her being rose in rebellion against the black. A current of new life was working its way feebly but very definitely through her veins. After all, was it really all so hopeless? It was something that she could still be helpful to people—the men at the hospital, for instance. Captain Bannister had asked her to come to him first and stay as long as she could, obviously because he liked her company. She blushed again, but this time like a happy girl, as she remembered the coaxing inflection of his voice, and the way he had almost clung to her hand—like a little child. That was how she thought of him—a little child, years younger than herself, of course. She must try and think of something fresh to amuse him to-morrow.

As she fastened the blue dress, she hummed a gay little tune.

"My dear Rachel," exclaimed her aunt at sight of her. "You surely didn't think it was going to be a party? Your black would have done perfectly well."

"I'm sorry," began Rachel, her little flicker of

cheerfulness quenched. "I thought you thought the black was too shabby."

"That must have cost a fearful price," put in Enid. "We're not used to such splendours here. Of course, in the country people don't consider it very good style."

"I had it long ago, and I thought I might as well wear it sometimes," Rachel apologized.

Enid threw all the incredulity she could produce into her face and voice, as she remarked: "Well, I must say it doesn't look like it. It's quite in the fashion for anyone who isn't a girl. I should take care of it if I were you. You can wear it at the dinner before the wedding. It's quite smart enough."

She was cut short by the entrance of Violet, a duplicate of Enid—slightly tarnished by eight years' matrimony—and her husband.

"Goodness me, Rachel," she exclaimed before she was well inside the door. "This *is* splendour. You might all have warned me and then I should have put on something smarter, not of course that I could have hoped to compete."

Behind her back her husband grinned timidly at Rachel. He would have liked to say something nice, but knew better.

The brakes of Tom's car drew Enid into the hall, whence the parlourmaid had discreetly vanished. She was lurking behind the passage door, exchanging pleasantries with the housemaid, until she heard them go into the drawing-room, and could follow at a decent interval to announce dinner.

At the table, the conversation was mainly supported by the master of the house and the two younger men on the semi-sacred topic of business. None of the Morland women would have interrupted their males in the act of speech. Soon these high matters would be exhausted, and then as there would be nothing else for the men to talk about, their turn would come for children and servants.

Tom Willson was the first to drop out. He had been watching Rachel in some surprise. Why, she was quite pretty; not his style, of course, he liked some one with more "go" in them, but she was pretty all the same. Funny he'd never noticed it before.

"Rachel looks better," he said in a low voice to his betrothed.

"There's nothing in the world the matter with her except nerves," snapped Enid. "She's well enough to go hanging about the officers in the Home all day. It's only when I ask her to come

and do anything with me that these headaches come on."

"They say there are quite a lot of men there," said Tom, vaguely aware that he had tripped. "Might go and look them up one of these days."

"At the Home? You'd better ask Rachel about it. I don't go there now the war's over. As long as there was any real nursing to be done, I did it, but now I've no time to waste pottering about convalescents. Besides, I shouldn't think you'd like it."

Tom managed to rise to the height of the implied rebuke, and then relapsed into silence. They all met so frequently and had such a paucity of interests, that even the engaged couple could not keep up a sustained flow of talk.

At dessert, the ladies ate three grapes and two chocolates apiece and then rose and left the room. Rachel shot an envious glance at the stairs, as they crossed the hall. Could she make her escape? But it would mean explanations and excuses and reasons. If they would only let her alone and take no notice of her. Her still weak nerves were all ajar like the strings of a piano when the lid has been slammed. The silly fuss about her dress, and then Enid's remarks about the hospital, which the latter seemed to take care she should hear,

had made her tingle with an absurd irritation. As soon as she reached the drawing-room she took up some work and carried it off to a chair under a lamp, away from the others who were gathered round the fire.

"And so Enid and I have decided to go to Buxton on the 4th, so as to give the servants a good rest before the wedding," she presently heard her aunt say, in a raised artificial voice. "I wanted your father to come, too, but he says he can't get away, so he will stay at the club in Hollingham, and join us for the week-ends."

Rachel began to listen more attentively. It was a habit of Mrs. Morland's to spring awkward announcements on the persons most concerned thus obliquely, and when supported by a numerous company, so that discussion or protest were almost impossible.

"What will Rachel do?" inquired Violet, obviously recognizing a cue.

Mrs. Morland turned half round in her chair.

"By the way, Rachel dear, I never asked you where you meant to go?" Her voice was even shriller and she smiled very brightly, looking a little flushed.

So this was her *congé,* thought Rachel. The

dress was probably the last straw. She felt a certain elation as if a door were being unlocked.

"I shall probably go to London, or . . . I may go to Paris." She spoke on a sudden impulse, born of an overpowering desire to get out of England, away from everything and everybody who had been in any way connected with the last ten years. A hundred happy memories, a hundred dear familiar places stretched out their arms to her. The high-pitched voices, the subtle all-pervading smell of burning charcoal, mixed with roasting coffee. . . . The blue spires in the late afternoon sky, the yellow lights twinkling along the misty river. . . . Her eyes smarted, and her throat ached with longing.

"Paris!" exclaimed Mrs. Morland, getting still pinker. "I don't think Uncle John would think that wise. Besides, you know, you will be coming to us for the wedding, for a fortnight, I hope, that's the 26th to the 9th, I think. It wouldn't do for you to go so far away."

"If I go there, I shall stay there," began Rachel with some heat. She seemed about to say something more, but changed her mind. She had suddenly remembered that leaving Crampton meant leaving the hospital; without it life looked blanker and emptier than ever.

Mrs. Morland hurriedly flew the better-say-no-more-at-present signal, and her daughters, who were sitting with mouths agape, plunged into a loud discussion on the rival merits of fire-grates.

Chapter VI

A NIGHT of more thinking than sleeping brought Rachel down next morning with a splitting headache, and all the look of returning youth wiped from her drawn white face. The sound of her aunt's and cousin's voices reverberated through her head, deafening her to the sense of what they said, but she was aware that Mrs. Morland looked nervous and blinked a good deal whenever she turned her head in her niece's direction. Her manner, too, was ruthlessly cheerful.

As soon as he had finished breakfast, Mr. Morland rose from the table, but instead of leaving the house immediately he called his niece to follow him into the morning-room.

"What's this I hear about you going to Paris?" he demanded as the door closed.

Rachel dropped on to a low chair, her hands hanging over her knees.

"It's cheaper there, you know, with the present exchange, and I have friends. . . ."

Mr. Morland's face became dangerously suffused, and he interrupted her rather loudly.

"That's all nonsense. You can't go living in Paris, and you ought to know it without me telling you. England's your country, and I'd like to know what you find wrong with it."

"As I shall have to more or less earn my own living, I thought you would rather I did it somewhere out of sight," said Rachel plucking up a little spirit.

Her uncle glared at her as if he were uncertain whether to waste more time on her or leave her to his wife. If she was going to say things like that he wasn't going to argue with her.

"Don't be a silly fool," he blustered. "I'll hear no nonsense about going to Paris, or earning your living either. You've got to remember whose family you belong to. If you get some decent woman to share a house with you, you can live perfectly well on what you've got, if you don't go wasting it on rubbish. And when Edward's about again, take better care of him. That's all I've got to say."

He clumped out of the room without waiting for a reply.

She stayed as he had left her, her throbbing head in her hands. Oh why had she been such an

idiot as to come back to them? Of course it was very good of them to take her in when she had nowhere else to go, and was too numbed and broken to shift for herself, but she could no more go on trying to fit her life to the mould they cut for it than she could put on the boots in which she had learnt to walk. Besides it was clear enough that they wanted her to go. She must find something if she could only think of it. Why hadn't she been made one of these splendid, strong-minded, modern women, all fists and elbows, who knew their own minds, and took care that other people knew them too. One of them would have crushed Uncle John with a couple of fierce brave sentences instead of tamely accepting his perfectly unwarrantable interference. She must go somewhere as soon as she could, if she could only think where. She supposed she owed it to them to respect their prejudices so far as to stop in England, but where could she go? London was too expensive and she hardly knew anywhere else. If only she didn't feel so tired . . . and so lonely. Somehow it seemed to her she had been lonely all her life. The slow tears gathered and fell on her folded hands, but she dried them hastily. Anyhow, she hadn't let Uncle John see her in weak humiliating tears. Probably he

thought her self-willed and strong-minded. It had amused her to see that they were sometimes rather afraid of her.

She laughed, and then remembered that she had promised to go to the Home early. Perhaps when her head was better she would find a way out of it all.

The nurses were hard at work on Christmas decorations, assisted by the more able-bodied patients. Rachel was soon involved in branches of evergreen and coils of wire, and for a time forgot her own worries in anxious discussions as to how to make the best of a rather scanty supply of holly. She had been at work for some time when a little stir below her caused her to look down from her ladder. A very beautiful dark woman was coming across the hall with Miss Crosse. In spite of her black velvet and furs she reminded Rachel of some gorgeous tropical bird. Her great dark eyes were so brilliant, the way she had of turning her head on her long graceful neck, and her vivid colouring. She was talking at the top of a clear ringing voice. Asking questions, making comments, as one who has never known a doubt of herself or criticism from others. Rachel was faintly reminded of an occasion when it had fallen to her lot to follow a

royal lady round the stalls at a bazaar. There had been the same vague amiability in the questions she put to those about her, and the same lofty disregard of the murmured replies. Substantial Miss Crosse looked quite wilted as she walked up the staircase beside her guest.

All the patients stood agape, and the nurses, dropping wire and scissors, clustered round the matron for information. It appeared that the lady was no other than the famous Mrs. Jack Reval, Captain Bannister's sister. She had come down to-day to meet a famous eye-specialist, who had been called in to see her brother. A discussion arose as to how far her reputation as a beauty was justified, and whether she was much made up. All hoped that she would come down soon and let them get a better look at her, but she had not reappeared when Rachel left to go home for lunch.

Her aunt and Enid had gone to Hollingham for the day, so she was free to eat as little as she chose without remark, and to spend what time remained on her bed fighting her headache. It occurred to her that if his sister was with him, Captain Bannister would hardly want her; at any rate she had better not go to him unless he sent for her. Her depression deepened. She felt singularly disin-

clined for either letter-writing or bead-work.

But that afternoon she was destined to do neither, for when she reached the hospital she was met almost on the door-step by the matron with the announcement that Mrs. Reval wanted to speak to her; would she please go up to Miss Crosse's sitting-room? Startled and mystified, Rachel made her way upstairs.

Mrs. Reval was alone when she entered the room, standing by the fireplace with one long slim foot on the fender.

"How very beautiful, but not a bit like him," thought Rachel.

And Mrs. Reval: "What a faded piece of gentility! Exactly what we want."

She came forward rather gushingly and drew Rachel down beside her on the sofa with gentle compelling firmness; smiling at her—a dazzling, intoxicating smile, which made the other woman forget a first impression of hardness. The bright eyes were passing face, dress, boots, gloves, in rapid review, but the syren lips smiled on, and the long curling lashes hid the quick appraising glance. Rachel was wearing a close ugly toque, which hid her hair, and a badly fitting serge coat, which concealed her figure, and made the tired droop of her

shoulders appear like a permanent stoop. Her headache had returned with renewed violence, her eyes smarted, and she moved a little on the sofa, so that she had her back to the waning light of the winter afternoon.

"You've been so good to my brother, Mrs. Cassilis," Mrs. Reval began, in a voice with a curious timbre that made you listen to it whether you wanted to or not. "He's had a rough time, poor old darling, and I'm afraid there's nothing much better in front of him. You know the doctors are very depressing about his eyes. The beasts threw a huge bomb right in among them in a narrow street. No one knows how he got out alive. His horse was killed and oh, well—*horrors!* They found a splinter which they thought was the trouble, but it didn't seem to make any difference to his sight. The man who came down to-day says its shock following on overwork and fever, and that there's only a narrow chance he'll ever see again."

Rachel gave a gasp of dismayed sympathy. Something bright splashed on the dingy serge of her knee.

"They say the *only* chance is for him to go away to a good climate, but somewhere very, very

quiet. Sir Henry is all for some seaside place in Portugal, that I never heard of. Monte—Monte—— Something that means the 'Happy Hill.'"

"Monte Felis," suggested Rachel.

"Yes, that's it. Do you know it?"

"Only by name. My mother was ordered there once; but for some reason, which I forget, we went to Algeçiras instead."

"That must have been some time ago?"

"Oh, many, many years, when I was quite a girl." Rachel felt as if most years in her life should count ten by the calendar.

She must be well over forty, Mrs. Reval decided.

"Well, to return to my poor Maurice," she resumed. "The doctor insists on this place instead of Biarritz, or the Riviera. I urged both, but he was quite obstinate about it. He says the whole thing lies in keeping him very quiet and yet amused and happy—he seems to think he's highly strung, which is all nonsense; he's not nearly so excitable as my other brother. I think myself he wants rousing. Perhaps it's better you should know: a brute of a girl he was engaged to had just thrown him over, to crown everything else. He won't hear a word against her; shut me up at once when

I said what I thought. But I can see he's taken it awfully hardly. She's going to marry an American with a perfectly disgusting amount of money; but it won't do her any good here, if we can help it." Mrs. Reval shut her teeth with a vicious little snap. Then she changed to her pathetic note again. "Well, now you see it all. The poor darling in this helpless state, and then so down about that wretched girl. I simply can't send him off to that dead-alive place with only a servant, and it's absolutely impossible for me to go with him myself. I've just taken a villa at Beaulieu. So in despair I come to you."

"Me!" exclaimed Rachel, "how can I help you?"

She had been wondering for the last ten minutes whither all this was leading. Now she knew. Her heart began to beat quickly, and she was obliged to bite her lips to steady them.

"I had to tell him this afternoon," went on Mrs. Reval, in soft broken tones. "He had no idea his recovery wasn't certain. He said that—nothing else. But his voice, you know, utterly broken and bewildered, one didn't have to see his face. It made one feel one couldn't refuse him anything. At first I couldn't get him to talk about this plan at all; but I absolutely had to get something settled,

so I asked him if there was anyone he would like to take with him as a sort of companion-secretary. I thought there might be some man here who would do. But he said at once he would rather go alone, and then when I told him I couldn't hear of it, and that I must find some one for him, he thought of you, and wondered if you could be persuaded. . . ."

"Me?" echoed Rachel again, but this time as if she were questioning herself rather than her companion.

Mrs. Reval was watching her closely. The longer she thought about it the better the plan pleased her. Maurice had spoken of her as "a Mrs. Cassilis who comes and reads to me. I think I could stand her better than anybody else. Not really old, you know, but elderly. She talks as if she'd finished with life, but she seems able to get about all right. She's not got any home of her own—lives with the most godless relations. I shouldn't think she's very well off." The woman's clothes certainly didn't suggest affluence—or coquetry.

Rachel was staring straight in front of her with a puzzled frown.

"I should have to think it over," she said pres-

ently. She was trying to analyse her own feelings, without conspicuous success.

"Of course we must look at it from a perfectly business-like point of view," Mrs. Reval began again. "I believe there is some recognized salary for that sort of secretarial work, which is really what it amounts to. . . ."

Rachel put up her hand, colouring painfully.

"Oh, I couldn't take anything, except perhaps my expenses. I have a little money of my own."

"Perhaps you want to consult your people?"

"No, I don't think there is anyone I need consult . . . except myself."

There was another long silence, which Mrs. Reval was too wise to break. As far as she could, she was trying to bring the whole weight of her remarkable will to bear on Rachel's hesitating mind. Gradually the whole thing began to look to the latter more and more like a perfectly simple solution to her difficulties. She refused to see it in any other light.

"I will go," she said abruptly, but added in dismay, "Oh, but I know nothing of nursing."

Mrs. Reval's brow cleared—as usual she was going to have her own way. Her manner became less caressing and more authoritative.

"That doesn't matter in the least. I've got a very good man, one of our footmen; he's not much of a valet, but he can do everything Maurice wants. By the way, you say you've been abroad. Can you speak any foreign languages?"

"French and Italian, and a little Spanish, which I believe is rather like Portuguese. My mother was an invalid, and we always lived abroad after my father's death."

Mrs. Reval rose and held out her hand.

"That's quite too lovely," she said vaguely. "And you can start in a fortnight, I hope? Somebody will write and tell you everything. Now, go and tell Maurice about it. I'm afraid I haven't time to see him again. *So* pleased. *Good*-bye."

"I must ask you one thing," Rachel exclaimed before Mrs. Reval reached the door. She turned rather impatiently. "It is that you won't say anything about this arrangement to Miss Crosse or anybody else here."

Mrs. Reval's carefully pruned eyebrows almost disappeared under her hat.

"Oh dear, no. I probably shan't be down here again," she replied indifferently. And with another nod was gone.

Rachel found Maurice feverish and restless.

"Well," he greeted her. "Have you seen Patch?"

"She tells me that you would like me to go with you to Monte Felis . . . as your secretary . . . hope you really feel as if I . . . as if you really *would* like me to go?"

"Then you mean you're coming?" he asked anxiously. "I'm an awful coward, I know," he stammered; "but I just can't face going alone or with a stranger."

His hand, wavering about, had found one of hers, and was gripping it, she thought unconsciously. Rachel put out her other hand and stroked his. All the dormant motherhood in her answering his helpless dependence.

"I know—I know," she answered gently and tenderly—more gently and tenderly than she had ever spoken in her life before.

"I believe you really do," murmured Maurice.

They stayed for a long time in silence, he holding her hand as if it brought him some comfort. The room grew dark and the fire burnt down to a glowing heap of ashes; but until his fingers relaxed, and she knew he was asleep, Rachel did not move.

Chapter VII

A FORTNIGHT later found Rachel walking up and down a platform at Charing Cross, waiting for her charge. She had not seen Mrs. Reval again, but a long letter of detailed instructions for the journey, worked out by a travel agency in concert with a secretary, reposed in her bag, together with letters of credit, and every variety of recommendation from heads of departments and foreign embassies. She wondered mildly if the Peace Conference itself had given much more trouble, and for her own part would have preferred to trust to the unbounded good-will of porters and railway officials towards the helpless, instead of rousing any latent Bolshevism in them by this clatter of big names. However, here they were, and apparently going to travel like royalty, or even conference delegates.

The last week had been spent at a friend's flat, collecting clothes. As she was to have no expenses to speak of for the next few months, she had felt that she might legitimately treat herself to a proper

outfit, and had gone the round of her old *fournisseurs*. She told herself that she was keeping her dependent position well before her eyes in making her choice between blacks and greys and gentle mauves, and that there was no reason at all why they should be badly made. It surprised her to find that she was taking quite a passionate interest in them.

"I really don't see why you worry so much about a little thing like that," her friend remarked one day, when Rachel had tramped half London in search of a particular shade of grey silk stockings. "The poor man can't possibly see you."

Rachel went scarlet to the roots of her hair, and Mrs. Skelton looked at her irresolutely as if there was something she would have liked to say if she had known how. After a minute or two she asked:

"I suppose you're *quite* committed to these people?"

"Quite," Rachel had replied with emphasis.

She took a turn up the platform and came face to face with her own reflection in the glass background of an advertisement. For a fraction of a second she looked at herself as a stranger, and then with a little rush of self-complacency realized that this pretty, well-dressed woman was no other than

herself. New thoughts, new interests, and above all a sense of coming freedom had brought the light back to her eyes, and a faint flush to her cheek. Her hair was no longer screwed away anyhow but nestled in soft puffs of pale gold under her smart blue hat. What could be quieter than dark navy blue and black fox? She seemed to argue with some unseen objector. There was nothing to be gained by looking like a servant. Anyhow it was too late to change anything. She gave a little shrug. She had lived too long with the Morlands and was contracting their habit of "seeing things" in the simplest matters.

This time to-morrow the inhospitable waters of the Channel would roll between her and them, and all the horror of poor Edward. Her spirits rose and the ghost of a dimple appeared at the corner of her mouth as she wondered what the household at Crampton would say if they could see her now. Without precisely deceiving them about her plans she had left a good many details undefined, choosing a moment when her aunt was engaged in computing the servants' board-wages during her forthcoming visit to Buxton to tell her that she had heard of an invalid, going to spend the winter in Portugal, who was willing to pay her expenses in return

for her companionship. Rather to her surprise Mrs. Morland had let the announcement pass without question and almost without comment, except to say that it would do very well, and that if Mrs. Willson said anything, it would be quite enough to tell her that she was travelling with friends. And so the matter dropped. Portugal had a dowdy, unfashionable sound, not like Rome or the Riviera. Two other people had said things which sounded as if they were hinting at a separation between the Cassilis, and Mrs. Morland was far too anxious to get Rachel out of sight to risk raising difficulties about the way she went. To her husband she had repeated Rachel's words, and to his question, "All quite sound, I suppose?" she replied: "Oh dear, yes; very nice people." And he too had been content to leave it at that.

After all, Rachel had frequently told herself she was not called upon to give them an account of all she did. What was the use of having a fuss, Supposing they took it into their heads to make one, which of course would be perfectly unreasonable. What she was doing, hundreds of women had done. If she had worn a nurse's uniform, it would have been the most natural thing in the world to go abroad with this poor man; and if as a nurse, why

not a secretary? It was only people like the poor dear Morlands with their dreadful little country town notions who would see anything in it.

A stir among the porters and passengers attracted her attention to a group of people making their way down the platform. First came Mrs. Reval, her black eyes turning this way and that, evidently in search of somebody. Behind her followed a dark, rather florid-looking man, holding the arm of a taller, slighter one, who walked stiffly with a stick. The upper half of his face was covered by a black, eyeless mask. Captain Bannister, of course. Somehow he looked quite a different person now he was up and dressed. Rachel confusedly realized that he was a man about her own age. She had never thought of him like that when he was in bed. The rest of the procession was composed of porters, a footman, and a man in plain clothes, evidently a servant.

Rachel went forward to meet them with a slightly heightened colour. Mrs. Reval on her side, looked rather taken aback, but she greeted her with her usual off-hand affability.

"Here's Mrs. Cassilis, Maurice," she said over her shoulder. "Archie, I want to introduce you to Mrs. Cassilis. My brother, Major Bannister.

Brewster this is Mrs. Cassilis, who is going to take care of the Captain."

The servant touched his hat, his wooden-toy face betraying nothing. Archie, on the contrary, stared with ill-concealed astonishment, and considerable appreciation.

"Here, Patch," he whispered, dragging his sister on one side, while Rachel was speaking to Maurice, "what to goodness made you think she was old? She's not a day over thirty, and would be jolly pretty if she was a bit fatter. I'll tell old Maurice he'd better hurry up and get his eyesight back."

"Sh . . . sh," hissed Mrs. Reval. "Maurice thinks she's as old as the hills. He's going off quite happily with her, so for mercy's sake don't start chipping him. She doesn't look in the least like she did when I saw her. Well, it can't be helped now."

"I've half a mind to see them as far as Paris," began Archie, but Maurice called him.

Rachel, to show an exact understanding of her position, had got into the carriage which had been reserved for them, and was helping Brewster to arrange rugs and cushions. But almost immediately Maurice was helped in, and lay down with

obvious relief. It was nearly time for the train to go.

"I shall run out and see you before long," announced Archie, "and very likely stop a week or two."

"Not you," laughed Maurice, "you'd be bored stiff in an hour."

"I'm not at all sure I should," returned his brother, with a deadly glance at Rachel, which was cleverly fielded and suppressed by his sister. She shook hands with Rachél, kissed Maurice affectionately, commanding him to enjoy himself, and got out on to the platform, driving Archie before her. The doors were slammed, the train moved off, and the first stage of the journey had begun.

Maurice at first seemed inclined to be talkative. He was full of the small adventures of the last few days since leaving the Home, declared he had missed her very much, and did not forget to ask after the Morlands. Brewster presently came in and made tea, and after that Rachel read the afternoon papers aloud, till seeing that he had gone to sleep, she took to looking out on the darkening January landscape, and tried to rid herself of a sense of the unreality of it all.

It was dark when they got to Dover. Maurice

woke shivering, in spite of his rugs, all his little spurt of animation gone. He could hardly drag himself out of the carriage, and went off to bed as soon as the hotel was reached, almost without wishing her good night.

The next morning she waited for him in some anxiety. At intervals during the night all sorts of unforeseen contingencies surged through her brain, making her forget her own part in it, in a growing realization of the dimensions of her task. "But I *must* get him through. . . . I mustn't fail him, he's got nobody but me," she kept repeating to herself, till she fell asleep with a dim undefined assurance that somehow or other she would succeed.

But Maurice's appearance when he walked out of the lift was the reverse of encouraging. He moved slowly and weakly, even his voice sounded exhausted. Brewster, in a gloomy whisper, informed her that he'd had "a work to get him dressed." With a growing conviction that he ought to have had another day's rest before going further she took her place beside him in the cab. Fortunately the crossing promised well.

"Your sister has even arranged a smooth sea for you," she told him.

"Patch is a wonderful woman, isn't she?" he re-

turned seriously. Rachel assented. Mrs. Reval had certainly effected marvels in the speed in which she had got him off her hands. Her influence seemed all-pervading, for as they reached the quay, officials of every description sprang up along their path like genii, all determined to do something, or arrange something, or, better still, to alter everything. Maurice began to be more than a little worried by it all.

"I really think Patch has overdone things a bit," he said in a voice tense with irritation when they reached the reserved cabin. "I seem to be giving an abominable lot of trouble."

"The London passengers are just arriving, which will absorb their energies for a bit," replied Rachel as she helped him off with his fur coat, and added hopefully: "They won't bother us again for another hour."

But she had hardly spoken when the purser's head appeared at the window.

"The King's Messenger's inquiring for you, sir; shall I ask him to step round?"

"No," said Maurice sharply; "tell him I'll be very glad to see him at Calais, and if anybody more asks for me you can tell them the same."

The purser withdrew crestfallen, and Rachel,

opening *The Times,* began to read the principal items of news.

At Calais she was thankful that he could not see the morbid interest of the crowd, which was more or less held back while they walked off the boat. But on the platform the difficulties of the high French railway carriages confronted them.

"We shall have to wait for Brewster, I think," began Rachel in an agony to get him into the train before he became conscious of the many staring eyes. She stopped one of the train officials and asked for their reserved compartment. He shrugged his shoulders; he knew nothing; didn't think there was one. Compartments were not reserved except for "les délégations" or "les couriers." Then he became filled with indignation as the lady still persisted. People who couldn't travel as ordinary folk shouldn't travel at all. The telegram from the Ministry which had seemed equal to commanding a special train in England only made him angrier.

Rachel was despairingly pressing a twenty-franc note into his hand, which he received with contempt, when a short, fair man came up.

"How are you, Bannister? Your sister told me to look out for you—Philip Howden, you know. I'm doing Messenger. Can I be of any use?"

Maurice turned his head vaguely in the direction of the voice. The tremor of his arm told Rachel how much it cost him to meet strangers.

"Sir Philip Howden?" he asked rather stiffly. "Thanks very much. There seems to be some mistake about the compartment they were to have reserved for us."

"Oh, that's all right, you can come into mine. It's the one they're putting the bags into." He looked tentatively at Rachel and seemed about to say something more.

"Captain Bannister would like to get in at once," she interposed in what she hoped was a secretarial voice. She edged Maurice towards the carriage, as Brewster at last appeared with the hand luggage. The train superintendent who had been hanging on their skirts in hopes of driving a better bargain departed, shrugging. The other passengers showed a disposition to form a circle round them.

"It's a honeymoon couple, don't you see? The poor husband must have been wounded in the war," announced one incautious voice. Maurice was fortunately being helped up the steep steps and didn't hear.

After he was settled down, Sir Philip left them to

go and get his own lunch, feeling not a little intrigued. Who on earth was she? He remembered that Mrs. Reval had said something about "a useful old frump" who was going out to look after Maurice. Evidently the "frump" had failed at the last minute, and this woman, whoever she was, had offered to see him as far as Paris. And yet, if this was so, would Bannister take her so much as a matter of course?

When he returned to his compartment, he found Maurice in the middle of lunch with the woman kneeling on the floor beside him putting fork or glass into his hand as he needed them. She seemed so much absorbed in her task that she did not notice his entrance until he spoke. Presently she rose to her feet, saying that she had a place in the compartment next door, and would come in presently to see if "Captain Bannister" wanted anything. Maurice let her go without protest or comment.

"A friend of yours, I suppose," Sir Philip ventured, when Brewster had cleared away the debris of the lunch.

"Who? Mrs. Cassilis?" asked Maurice indifferently. "She's very kindly coming out with me to Portugal. My secretary, Patch calls her, and I

suppose that's what she is. She reads to me, and writes my letters, and keeps Brewster up to his job. I say, didn't I introduce you to her? How beastly rude of me!"

At Amiens Rachel came in to see if he would have some coffee. She stayed talking easily and naturally to both men, and to a "poilu" who had got the coffee for her and was disposed to linger and exchange impressions with the happy informality of his kind. It struck Maurice that she seemed to know exactly how to take him. Only a very well-bred woman knew how to talk to her social inferiors, especially male ones. It pleased his fastidiousness. Again, as when she had talked to the train official, he noticed how good her French was. Howden seemed disposed to be dashed civil. He was waiting on her hand and foot.

When the train went on again, Sir Philip was urgent that she should stay, but she said that she had left her things in the other compartment, and unless Captain Bannister wanted her to read to him, she would go back. She was beginning to see that if she wished to avoid awkwardnesses, she must take a very definite line. He was her employer, first and last, and there their relations began and ended.

"She's a dear old thing, isn't she?" Maurice remarked placidly when she had gone.

Sir Philip stared at him blankly, but was too tactful to offer any contradiction, and they drifted into other topics.

Chapter VIII

AFTER Paris they travelled mostly at night to give Maurice the benefit of the sleeping cars, with halts of two or three days at a time, which he spent in bed, hardly troubling to ask where they were.

At first Rachel feared that his depression was growing on him, but then came to the conclusion that as he grew more used to her, he ceased to make any effort to hide it. It was *that* that she must attack, if she could only cure him of his moral hurts his physical ones would cure themselves. So she set her teeth and refused to be defeated, even when for hours together he would maintain an impenetrable brooding silence, from which she could extract nothing but occasional monosyllabic thanks. At such times she would find herself hating the unknown Corisande with a fierce never-forgivingness, not for the hurt she had done him, but for her power to hurt him at all.

All the same, in spite of appearing to take very little notice of her, there was no doubt that on the

whole he liked to have her with him. If she went out, she must tell him exactly when she would be back, and if she was longer than she had said, Brewster was invariably sent to look for her.

At length the journey came to an end one starlit evening, too late to gather more than a confused impression of soft dark air, scented with flowering laurel, and somewhere away in the darkness, the rhythmic splash of the sea. Then a gaunt, white hotel, bare and clean, if devoid of all conventional luxury, but promising a degree of modest comfort.

Rachel went to bed in a spirit of profound thankfulness that they had got so far so well, and more confident than usual of an equally serene future.

The next morning she went down early to send off a telegram to Mrs. Reval, announcing their safe arrival. Brewster reported that his master had had an excellent night, and was altogether much better than might have been expected. He was even talking about getting up before lunch.

Her wire dispatched, she went out into the little hotel garden. It was very small but very sunny. Everywhere roses and heliotrope fought each other for a hold on the walls. Below them the flowerbeds were purple, with giant violets, clustering round the trenches dug at the roots of the tangerine trees.

Rachel picked some of the latter's long pointed leaves, crushing them in her hand as she had so often done at Grasse when she was a child. As she sniffed them the last twelve years rolled away like an evil-looking cloud, and she found herself young again and all agog for the thrilling adventure of life.

She asked a gardener, who was watering, if she might pick some heliotrope, and was pleased to find he understood her rustic Spanish, or at least the intention of it, for he forthwith produced a large open knife from his trouser pocket, and proceeded to slash right and left among the flowers. It was with some difficulty that she stopped him clearing half the garden.

One by one other people, apparently visitors, began to appear. They were all English as far as she could judge, and of the pattern which seems to have become indelibly stamped on the brains of French novelists to the exclusion of any other. "La vieille fille," flat of chest and long toothed, "La jeune Miss," fresh coloured and untidy, and "Le clergyman," the embodiment of innocent vacuity. They stared at Rachel with reserved hostility mingled with a kind of grudging curiosity, as she stood looking out across the blue bay, her arms full of flowers, and the sun playing among her fair curls.

There was an air of fragile elegance about her which gave an expensive look to her plain grey skirt and white blouse. Who was she? There had been rumours for some days past of the coming of a "milord inglez," but as none of the hotel could speak a word of English, except the porter and one of the waiters, who at best could only be relied on for set answers to set questions, no one had come to any very clear understanding as to who he was, or how many people he had with him. Perhaps this was his daughter, or if a young man, his wife.

The clergyman at length extracted himself from a palsied wicker chair, and wandered down the path towards her.

"Er—lovely view," he ventured. "May I ask if you're making a long stay here?"

"Bother," thought Rachel, but aloud she restricted herself to a brief affirmative and turned towards the hotel. "Perhaps if I'm thoroughly disagreeable I can keep them off," she reflected as she went indoors.

She found Maurice, with a window towards the sea wide open, and the whole room bathed in sunlight. He was sitting up in bed talking cheerfully to Brewster. She held out the flowers to him and he began to amuse himself by trying to identify

their scents. Rachel waited for the usual reaction, but it did not come. Instead he persisted in his intention of getting up, and she went to see if the sitting-room was ready.

In writing for accommodation at the Grand Hotel Lusitania, a comfortable private sitting-room had been ordered and promised, but when she inquired for it she was met by a string of evasions and equivocations in the manager's best pidgin French. It ultimately transpired that he had never for one moment supposed that they would persist in such a senseless demand when they saw the large and splendid *salon,* always full of people, where the senhor could smoke and play cards all day. Also there was the verandah, whence one could admire the view of the road past the hotel, and all the automobiles going up and down. When people weren't actually in bed and asleep, they wanted to be seeing and conversing with their fellow-creatures. Many of the visitors this year were English, and of the best families, he added persuasively.

But Rachel was adamant. He must produce the promised room or they would move to another hotel.

More arguments; if the senhora chose to expose the senhor to the horrors, zoological and culinary—he declined to say where, but she could ask anybody

else—of course he had no more to say. He then proceeded to say a good deal, but quite suddenly threw up his arms and announced with a beaming smile that he only lived to humour his clients, and that if she would pay the full board of the hypothetical person who might otherwise have occupied the room, as well as its rent when transformed, she could have number twenty.

He opened the door of a small bedroom next her own, and said he would have it cleared at once.

Could this really be done at once? Instantly, without a moment's delay. He would give the order himself.

Half an hour passed while Rachel sat on the bed and waited. Then she rang the bell, and on the appearance of a chambermaid, looking like a badly stuffed flock mattress set on end, asked her to carry some of the smaller things into the passage.

The girl remarked "Jésus," after staring vaguely at Rachel's hair, and slithered away in her heelless slippers. Rachel groaned and set to work to tug at the dressing-table and round iron washstand. She had just succeeded in getting the latter into the passage, when a heated valet de chambre rushed up and snatched it from her. Behind him came the chambermaid who took up a neutral position on the

other side of the passage, giggling. In vain Rachel did her best to explain, her Spanish coming out more and more Italian. Manuel made no reply except to clear his throat resoundingly and spit out of the window. Evidently, in his opinion, the matter was closed. He picked up his dust-pan and brush again and was departing down the passage with the chambermaid ambling in his wake, when the head of the manager rose cautiously above the turn of the stairs. It instantly sank again when he saw that Rachel was still there, but she dashed after him. Were they or were they not to have the sitting-room that day? If not, she would move to the "Portugalia" after lunch. The sitting-room? He seemed to search his memory. To be sure they should have it that day, if they really wanted it. If he had understood that she wanted it at once, it should have been all ready long ago. He changed his tone and began to rave violently at both servants, muttering to himself between-whiles. A scene of confused and violent activity ensued, reminding Rachel of an amateur fire-brigade salving the property of someone against whom it nourishes a well-developed spite. Bed, chairs, dressing-table, and wardrobe, were successively hurled into the passage, to be met by a stream of waiters in *négligé,* with a

collection of oddments from the public sitting-rooms on their backs.

At last came a knock on the door of her bedroom where she had taken refuge and the voice of the manager announcing in honeyed tones that all was ready.

Rachel entered her new domain, as a victorious general might march into a surrendered fortress after a long and seemingly hopeless siege. It was certainly bare enough of all superfluous luxuries. In the centre of the oil-cloth covered floor, stood a round table, with a green table-cloth, enriched by a design of sunflowers laid on in yellow flannel. Six small angular chairs stood round it, upholstered in a drab material of a ghostly Gothic pattern, dimmed by years of dust and sun, and further adorned by a row of plush balls, for the most part conspicuous by their absence. Against one wall stood a massive card-table, suggesting a small altar in size and weight, and against the other a little black table, on to which every pattern of the chip-carver's manual seemed to have been crowded, together with a superimposed arrangement of projecting brass ornaments. It was "pau santo," Manuel informed her in a hushed voice. Rachel endeavoured to look duly impressed. There was nothing else. Where

was she going to put her invalid? She tried to explain this to Manuel, who nodded violently and said "Si, si." He beckoned her to follow him down the passage, and stopping outside the door of a room, placed his eye to the large keyhole. Having satisfied himself that the occupant was absent, he knocked loudly and walked in. It was a plain, bare room, like the others, but under the window stood a small, dingy sofa, about four feet long, with a steep upward incline at one end. With the gesture of a successful conjurer, he indicated that the last problem had been solved, while poor Rachel struggled in vain with a mirth-provoking vision of Maurice endeavouring to dispose his long limbs on and about the little sofa's uneasy frame. Manuel's engaging smile gradually faded, giving place to sulky shrugs, as she broke it to him that not only would this not do, but that he must bring up one of the cane chairs from the garden, which, in his opinion, was not at all "bonito," and even when he had adorned it with a crochet antimacassar, completely marred the beauty of the *sala*. He departed to an upper floor, talking indignantly to himself.

Rachel looked about her. At any rate it promised peace and quiet. Perhaps, when she had arranged the flowers, and put out books and odds and ends,

it wouldn't look so like a convent parlour. After another wrestle, this time with the chambermaid, she obtained some jars and bowls of quaint rough pottery, quite the most attractive things the country had so far offered them. She was just finishing her last vases, when Maurice appeared at the door. He made her take him all round the little room, telling him which each piece of furniture was, so that with a little practice, he could find his way about without assistance. After skinning first one ankle, and then the other, on the "pau santo" table, he hit on the brilliant idea of keeping a vase of heliotrope on it, which, as it was the strongest scented of the flowers, would serve as a danger signal. He was more amused and animated than Rachel had ever seen him, and not till he had successfully accomplished his round three times, without knocking anything over, would he consent to go to his chair.

Their troubles, however, were not at an end. Brewster, who had gone down to hurry the appearance of lunch, returned with a flushed face, and the grudging admission that he could make nothing of their " 'eathen talk." He added that it was evidently market day, and that when he had laid hold of a tray, with a view to helping himself, the head waiter had "raved fit to bust."

There was nothing for it but for Rachel to go herself. At the door of the "salle à manger" she was met by thick fumes of tobacco-smoke, mingled with wine, through which she dimly descried a roaring, gobbling multitude of black-coated gentlemen, laughing, shouting, eating voraciously. From the plates piled with orange peel, it was evident that they were nearing the end of their repast. They sat awry upon their chairs, their waistcoats negligently unbuttoned, while they cordially toasted each other, glass in one hand and a deftly wielded toothpick in the other. Here and there in frigid isolation, like icebergs protruding from a tempestuous sea, sat little groups of English trying to appear unconscious of the uproar, save when they commented, none too discreetly, on the manners of their fellow-guests. There was little hope of extracting anything from the perspiring waiters, who shot to and fro among the tables, so with despair in her heart, Rachel went in search of the manager again. She found him in a little cupboard off the hall, napkin under chin, lunching with an incredibly stout wife and two equally incredibly thin children. The whole family were full of mixed French, Spanish, and Portuguese sympathy—"El pobre señor . . aveugle, n'est-ce pas? coitado."

"Yes, yes," said Rachel, "but his lunch, poor man." His lunch! Of course, had the senhora spoken to the head waiter? She had only to say that the senhor wished to lunch, and it would be ready. But it had been ordered for half-past twelve, and it was now a quarter-past one. Quite so, quite so; for the moment they were rather busy. The senhora would understand. A political group had honoured their hotel by coming there to celebrate a recent triumph. . . . Senhor Gonçalves was cut short by a deputation from the said group, who insisted that he should join them in their last bottle of port. Rachel wondered if Mrs. Reval herself could have managed these people. There was nothing for it, but to fetch Brewster, and together to seize food, plates, and glasses. It had, at last, the desired effect of rousing the head water to the situation, and he came himself, explaining jauntily that to-morrow milord's lunch should be served at any moment he chose to order it.

They found Maurice inclined to be eloquent. His French was all the more impressive from the Hindustani which kept cropping up in it. His eyeless mask, too, seemed to petrify the waiter. All his effervescence left him. He would attend to it himself; the senhor should never have cause for com-

plaint again—never, never, never. His voice threatened to trail away in tears. Rachel registered a private vow that in future she would leave reproof and complaints to Maurice—he could be extraordinarily impressive; besides it roused him and did him good.

Fortunately, now the food had come, it was excellent, and she went down to her lunch fairly happy. On the doorstep the politicals were embracing Senhor Gonçalves, each other, and anyone else who came within arm's length. They were about to depart in a fleet of motors, whose engines had been left running the whole time their patrons had been in the hotel, and now moved off, their unmuzzled exhausts making enough noise to render a Zeppelin inaudible. Only the residents, who had lunched later, were left in the dining-room. At one table sat a faded-looking woman, with what Mr. Shaw has taught us to recognize as an Earl's Court accent, and a boy of eighteen, obviously her son. He seemed an ill-conditioned youth, who contradicted or derided every word his mother spoke. Next to them came an angular, flat-chested woman, with a general air of dyspepsia, and opposite her a rather pretty, fresh-looking girl, with untidy hair and sunburnt arms. They were talking across the inter-

vening space between their table and that of the clergyman. From his moustache, and white evening tie, under an unclerical flannel collar, Rachel judged that the latter belonged to the Evangelical school of thought. His wife was rather the taller of the two. Two men, with shaggy hair, clad in rough tweed, completed the British element. They were discussing Russian fiction, and apparently considered the pronunciation of the names they used a matter for private judgment, since they each adopted different systems. The only other occupants of the room were obviously Portuguese. A stout, middle-aged lady, with cow-like brown eyes, who sat silently ruminating, and occasionally diving between her back teeth with a toothpick. From time to time she smiled slowly and carefully at the young man who was with her, who talked ceaselessly, with a profusion of gestures. He was dressed in grey drill uniform, embellished with numberless pockets, and looked smart and well turned-out, though to British ideas the effect was rather marred by a pair of bright yellow kid buttoned boots, and the fact that he had postponed shaving till later in the day. He and his mother fixed their eyes on Rachel with the steady, unwavering gaze of children staring at a wax-work. Presently

they all got up to go—all, that is to say, but the clergyman's wife, who, with a bright "You go on, dear," to her husband, stopped at Rachel's table.

"I'm afraid you had some little difficulty just before lunch," she began, in a tone of parochial cordiality. "You must come to us, you know, if you have any trouble. I speak French, and Gonçalves will always do anything for us. My husband, Dr. Philbeach, is chaplain here, so I look on it as my place to mother all new-comers." She laughed artificially. Rachel was beginning a brief acknowledgment of her kind intentions, but she was cut short.

"Now you must just tell me what the little matter was, and I know I shall be able to put it right. These people mean very well, but they haven't any method. Still, as I always say, you must be patient with them. Foreigners are never practical, are they? But I love them, so I don't mind their little ways. I'm not a bit the conventional Englishwoman. My friends tell me I'm a regular Bohemian, and I suppose that is how I come to understand them. But, of course, to those who haven't been abroad before, I'm sure they must all seem very odd."

"Thank you," said Rachel, for the second time.

"It was only about some lunch I wanted to have taken upstairs, but our own servant will do it in future."

Mrs. Philbeach beamed more brightly than ever.

"Now, don't you see, that's just where I come in. You must come with me at once to Senhor Gonçalves, and tell me what it is that you want him to do, and I will tell him."

"Thank you; I have already spoken to him."

"Ah, but he doesn't understand any English. I tell him I shall have to teach him, now that they have so many English visitors. It's so inconvenient for him; I can't think what would happen if I weren't here. You had some fuss about a room this morning, too, didn't you? Now, if you had only come to me, I could have explained to you that it isn't the custom to have private sitting-rooms here. When we come abroad, we English have to shake off our unsociable ways! Of course, it is just what I love, but then that's me—I simply adore humanity, I can't have too much of it. Come, and we'll go and put this little matter straight with Gonçalves. I can tell you, if I go with you, there will be nothing he won't do for you. They all chaff me about it!"

"You are very kind, but he seems to understand

French, and as his wife is Spanish, she can translate . . ."

"Spanish! Now don't go and tell me you are Spanish, with that fair hair."

"I won't," said Rachel, with a smile. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I think I must go."

"Well, don't forget to come to me the next time you're in any little difficulty. And I hope you'll join the choir in our little church. You needn't mind if you haven't much voice. It's all very simple you know, but what we aim at is *brightness.* And—er Mr. Bannister too; I'm sure he would like to come down and hear the singing. It's such a pleasure to the blind, as, alas! Gonçalves tells me he is. Is he your father?"

"No," said Rachel edging towards the door, "he isn't."

"Well, I shall come and look you up one of these days and try my hand at cheering him. My friends tell me they can't be dull when I'm there." Mrs. Philbeach waved a cordial hand laden with bangles.

"I thought you were never coming back," Maurice greeted her. She told him what had been happening. To her surprise he did not seem as appalled as she was at the idea of Mrs. Philbeach's proffered friendship.

"After all," he said, "it will be dull for you with only me. We'd better have her up to tea one day, and the padre too. What's he like?"

"Ga-ga," replied Rachel shortly. She was secretly and unreasoningly hurt that he should suggest that they wanted anybody's company but their own.

Chapter IX

FOR the first few days Maurice remained more or less invisible to his fellow-guests, but towards the end of a week he elected to go for a drive, and a carriage was ordered for half-past two. It was an hour when the English mail usually came in, and a good many people were standing about the hall as he crossed it holding Rachel's arm. The latter was painfully conscious of various excited faces, including Dr. Philbeach's.

"What's the hurry?" asked Maurice, artlessly.

"Some one may take the cab."

"That's all right, Brewster's there, isn't he? If I fall down it will be longer in the end. Lord! That was a peck." He had stumbled over a hole in a piece of matting. Rachel remorsefully clutched him closer, and Dr. Philbeach hurried forward with a "Do take my arm, sir. These foreigners don't understand furnishing. There should be a good carpet here, not these miserable strips of stuff. Most dangerous. We are sorry not to have seen you before. My wife has been making Mrs.

Bannister's acquaintance—mind the step—gently does it."

Rachel's face was flaming.

"Will you need both rugs, do you think, *Captain Bannister?*" she asked.

"Rugs? No, not both—unless you think you may be cold, *Mrs. Cassilis,*" he answered, mimicking her. Rachel to her surprise saw that he was laughing. The clergyman's face looked blank astonishment.

"Silly old ass thinks you're my mother," laughed Maurice, as they drove off. "Why did you give it away? And by the way, I wish you'd call me Maurice, everybody does. Let's pretend you're my aunt; I never had one who was kind to me before. Tell me, Aunty, what are we passing now?"

"You'll find there's a seamy side to most aunts if you involve us with the Philbeachs. They're impossible people."

Mothers? Aunts? What on earth did he mean? For one long bewildered moment Rachel struggled with conjecture, and then the truth broke in on her. A truth so incredible, so—so ridiculous that it was all she could do not to break into wild, hysterical laughter. Maurice must think that she was a middle-aged woman, perhaps quite old. *This* was

the explanation of his deference to her opinions, his fears lest she should overtire herself. His innocent notion that she would enjoy the society of her contemporaries in the persons of the chaplain and his wife. But how in the world had he come by such an idea? Was it her general tiredness and flatness when he had first known her? But why hadn't Mrs. Reval told him? She must have thought very much the same. At the time Rachel had to admit she had more or less deliberately made a fright of herself. She had looked extremely ill, and like most fair women illness aged her. Besides, in the Reval-Bannister world nobody looked their own ages. She had been astonished to hear that Mrs. Reval who seemed about twenty-eight was close on forty. Perhaps it wasn't surprising that she had taken Rachel for her elder by six or seven years.

But how about Maurice? Ought she to tell him? Suppose he didn't like the idea of the look of travelling about with a woman of her age, and well, if it came to that, appearance? And yet what was to be done? She couldn't leave him alone here, with Brewster, so why worry him about what couldn't be helped?

The carriage had turned inland, and was pro-

gressing at a gentle jog across a wide plain, stretching in undulations to the foot of a jagged range of mountains. No habitations, no trees, save a row of stunted olives along the side of the road, bent almost double by the perpetual north wind. On all sides lay the dark red earth, littered with grey stones and low growing scrub. Here and there were clumps of purple iris, and once, when they passed a sheet of white narcissus, Rachel got out and gathered handfuls. There seemed no living creature anywhere, except the herds of thin brown sheep, cropping such tufts of grass as they could find, the bells round their necks making a gentle, melancholy tinkle. Once or twice they passed an ox-cart, creaking along on wheels of solid wood, and drawn by gentle looking, wide-horned oxen, whose guardian was generally peacefully asleep in the cart, but who would wake from time to time to administer a prod and give vent to a long, inhuman wail. Every sound, every scent, Rachel did her best to interpret, devoting all her mind to the task, to the exclusion of other thoughts. Maurice listened absorbed.

"One could put it all to music, if one knew how," he said, half to himself.

A wonderful peace seemed all round them, in

which the only jarring note was the restless animation of the driver. He sat, for the most part, screwed round facing his passengers, only glancing carelessly over his shoulder at the horses when one of them had stumbled rather worse than usual. Finding the senhora could speak to him in Spanish, he concluded that for once conversation would be an easy matter with the Inglezes. On the slightest encouragement he poured forth numberless comments and questions. As usual, beginning with the "pobre senhor, coitado." How had he been hurt? Where had it happened? Would he get better? Poor thing. The lively little eyes, so like a marmoset's, softened and swam with sympathy. Every day he would come himself and fetch the senhor for a drive—every day a different drive. Monte Felis was but a poor place in winter; the senhora should have come in summer, when it was so full that there was no room at all. Thousands of motors, and so much dust that it was impossible to see the horses' heads. Almost every day an accident. He put the reins under his foot, to have both hands free to demonstrate his meaning, and convey something of the brilliancy of the scene. Now there was almost no one except the Inglezes, who, praise God, were coming back again. They

didn't take many carriages, to be sure, but they paid well when they did. Before the Revolution—that is to say, the first of all the Revolutions—there had been many English, but after that no one had cared to come to Portugal. They were afraid. It was a pity. Then there had been the war. The war, in his opinion, had been a piece of folly. A cousin of his had been there and had come home without a thumb. The said cousin reported great violence on the part of the Austrians.

"Austrians?" queried Rachel.

"Yes, very tall men, fighting among the English."

"Australians?" she suggested.

"Si, si, exactly," it was the same thing. The Germans were certainly very bad people. They had attacked the Portuguese, though they had promised they would not do so, and if it had not been for the heroism of the latter, the English and French would have been swept into the sea. He himself had a very good notion of what war was like, not only from his cousin's account, but because he had become accidentally involved in the Revolution of December the 7th. A bomb had been thrown in the street he was running down, three large windows had suffered severely, and a splinter of glass had

lodged itself in his nose. As he leant over to show the traces of the injury, the carriage stopped with a jerk. One of the horses had at last fallen down, and lay so still that Rachel at first thought it was dead. It transpired, however, that it was uninjured, but that it was its habit to snatch such repose as could be extracted from these incidents. Its companion drooped over it, evidently meditating a similar collapse. The driver, who had narrowly escaped overbalancing into the cab, sat staring at them reproachfully. "And then?" he inquired. As the horses offered no reply, he ejaculated "Aie—Aie!" and clambered off the box. He began hauling away at the bridle of the fallen horse. It at once came off in his hand and the weary head sank back once more into its former position, while the driver staggered against a small wall which opportunely intervened. He held the broken parts of the throat-lash together, as if he expected them to join up. As nothing of the kind happened, he remarked, rapidly but without animosity: "A thousand thunderbolts split you, mule of the devil!" and dived into a receptacle under the box seat, from which he extracted numerous short lengths of string. By the time repairs were effected, it was too late to go further, and they had to return to the

hotel. There was no one about when they arrived, and they went upstairs in happy ignorance of the swarm of comment which was buzzing round their names.

Their carriage had not turned the corner of the hotel before the room inhabited by the chaplain and his wife was alive with rumour. Mrs. Philbeach was lying on her bed, with her eyes closed, one foot, so to speak, already raised to take the step across the borderline which divides dozing from genuine slumber, when her husband's form suddenly surged up at her bedside. She sat up in some excitement. A telegram from home announcing the death of some member of the family from influenza, she instantly surmised. His brain was as active as her husband's was the reverse, and she was already deciding which of her coats and skirts would best dye black, before he spoke.

"I—er—I," he began.

"Yes, yes, is it Aunt Julia?" his wife demanded impatiently. Aunt Julia, after all, was a childless widow.

"Aunt Julia? Now I wonder what made your mind fly to Aunt Julia, my dear? Curious, very curious, you know, that it should. Shows there is after all something in this idea of telepathy, or

thought-transference. Pou will hardly believe me, but only last night I dreamt of Aunt Julia as we saw her last, driving in her little pony carriage at Tunbridge Wells, I remember. . . ."

"Yes, yes," said his wife, still more impatiently, "but that wasn't what you came to tell me."

"No, my dear, quite true, it wasn't. But you must admit the coincidence was very curious. My dreaming of Aunt Julia last night and your thinking of her like that this afternoon, when we have neither of us had any very recent news of her."

"Then if it isn't Aunt Julia who is dead, who is it?"

"Dead, my dear? Indeed, I hope nobody. The fact that we should both have thought of Aunt Julia surely need not mean that anything unfortunate has happened to her. I am surprised, dear, that you should suggest it. You know how strongly I feel about these foolish superstitions. . . ."

As a rule Mrs. Philbeach's patience lasted longer with her husband than with anybody else, but there was a limit beyond which even he could not go. She now interrupted him firmly and decisively: "Herbert, tell me at once what it was you were going to say when you came into this room."

Dr. Philbeach blinked, and thought hard.

"It was—let me see—oh, yes, about that young couple, the Bannisters, or rather, not a couple, as it now seems."

"Not a couple? My dear Herbert, I never said anything about a couple. I told you that I spoke to that fair woman who is here with the blind man. I suppose he is her brother, as she said it wasn't her father. Do you mean he is her husband?"

"No—at least, yes; for the matter of that, I should think not."

"You had better sit down and tell me exactly who you have seen and what they said, and what you said," Mrs. Philbeach told him, firmly. She lowered her own feet to the floor, sitting very upright on the edge of the bed. Dr. Philbeach sat down beside her and obediently began at the beginning. Unconsciously he drifted into the tone he adopted when introducing narrative matter into his sermons.

"I was standing in the hall, just now, waiting for the afternoon letters, when my attention was drawn to a tall, dark young man, the upper part of whose face was concealed by a black shade or mask. He was led by the arm by the young woman who sits near us at meals, and who, you informed me, was called Bannister. As they came towards me,

the young man tripped on that piece of matting which is curled up at the edge, and I at once went forward to offer my arm. I took the occasion to say a few civil words about not having seen them when we called, and also to mention that you had already made Mrs. Bannister's acquaintance, for I saw at once that the lady could hardly be his daughter or niece. What was my astonishment to observe that she seemed extremely embarrassed, and immediately afterwards addressed her companion as 'Captain Bannister,' while he in turn apostrophized her as Mrs. Cassilis."

Dr. Philbeach turned to enjoy his wife's amazement, and found her looking quite as red and excited as he had hoped. "Humph!" she remarked. "No wonder she didn't seem anxious to tell me who she was with. You must speak to Gonçalves, Herbert."

"Speak to Gonçalves, Alicia? What has it to do with him? Besides, what can we say? We only know that Captain Bannister is not this Mrs. Cassilis' father, as you supposed. . . ."

"I never did anything of the kind. Gonçalves was perfectly clear that they were not husband and wife, and so I naturally concluded that the man, whoever he was, must be her brother or her father.

All the luggage labels on their boxes are 'Bannister.' You can see them yourself, if you go along the first floor corridor."

Dr. Philbeach fixed his eyes on the fly-blown electric-light bulb, and began to intone: "A great change has come over the world. This terrible war, which has been the scourge of so many thousand lives. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Herbert, I know what you are going to say. People do very queer things nowadays. But you and I are here to give the tone to the English in this place—we cannot hope to control the foreign element (by which she meant the native), though our example may do much, and at least we can show by our own attitude that—that—well, we don't approve of that sort of thing. I shall speak to Miss Simmonds and Mrs. Pringle."

Mrs. Philbeach stood up and looked about for her shoes. As she did so, she noticed a hole in the toe of one of her black cotton stockings. There would have been time to change it before tea, but she decided that, as only a very untoward accident would be likely to betray its presence, it was not worth the trouble. Instead, she smoothed her hair very neatly and put on two more bangles, and asked her husband if he were ready. Dr. Philbeach still

sat on the bed, looking rather frightened and crumpled. He devoutly hoped his wife was not going to drive him into one of those nasty fusses like the one they had had at Montrueil, which had nearly landed them in a libel action. He was sorry now he had told her anything, though she was bound to have ferreted it out for herself sooner or later.

"After all," he said weakly, grasping at a straw, "she may be his nurse."

"Nurse!" snorted Mrs. Philbeach. "With those pearls! Do try to be a man of the world, Herbert!"

It was the amiable and pleasant custom for the Philbeaches, Mrs. Pringle and Percy, and Miss Simmonds with her young friend, Daisy Carter, to join forces every afternoon at half-past four round the tea-table. It was then that new arrivals were discussed, and collections of shells and wild flowers compared. This afternoon the first sight of Mrs. Philbeach was enough to inform the rest of the group that something new was in the wind. She talked carelessly and rapidly on indifferent subjects, while Dr. Philbeach sat by in silence, indecision and apprehension written on every feature. At length the tea-trays appeared, and after a skilful manœuvre, which put Daisy and Percy at a table

by themselves, the three elder ladies drew their chairs together. Mrs. Philbeach cleared her throat, shook her bangles, and proceeded to relate what her husband had told her.

"Bannister, did you say?" queried Miss Simmonds, abruptly.

"Yes, Bannister. The name is up on the board on the wall against 18, 19, 20, and 21—those rooms at the end of the passage on the first floor. As I came along just now I saw the manservant bring out a tin case from number 19, with 'Captain M. L. Bannister, X's Horse,' painted on it in white letters."

"Humph," croaked Miss Simmonds in a voice like a hen-turkey. "*Now* nothing you say surprises me. Such a nice girl, the niece of our Dean, was engaged to him last summer, but it was broken off, because she couldn't stand his ways, I gathered. The Deanery people don't at all approve of the smart set."

"I've heard a great deal about the Bannisters from a lady who is a great friend of mine," twittered Mrs. Pringle, who lived in a refined society in a southern suburb, and talked elegantly of serviettes and fiancés and the upper ten, "She told me that Mrs. Jack Reval—that's the sister, you know—is

the fastest woman in London, and that the brother, who is something in the Grenadiers, is always mixed up in some divorce case."

She paused, rustling with reprehension and chronic bronchitis. Mrs. Philbeach assumed the air of one whom no new phase of human iniquity can surprise.

"Of course all those sort of people are like that," she announced largely. "As soon as I knew what class he belonged to I knew what to expect. Rotten, every one of them, and that's what nearly lost us the war. I'm thankful I've managed to avoid knowing any of them up to now."

Miss Simmonds, who's father had been an Archdeacon, looked affronted, and Mrs. Pringle hastened to justify her friend.

"Of course, Mrs. Wildman, the lady I spoke of, is obliged to know them through her husband attending so many of the aristocracy. She doesn't at all care for that sort of thing herself, I can assure you. Only she's very much sought after in Mayfair, quite a favourite, and always dressed in the most perfect taste. It's everything for his practice, I tell her husband. Of course that's why she does it; but she doesn't care for them, not she. She tells them some fine home truths, and doesn't care

what she says. Why she told me herself that she said to the Countess of . . ."

"Give me some money, mother, I'm out of cigs.," interrupted the speaker's offspring.

Mrs. Pringle dived nervously among the contents of an overcrowded little bag.

"You smoke too much, Percy, you know you do," she ventured. "You know what Dr. Philbeach said."

Percy looked as if he had his own opinion of Dr. Philbeach and would have liked to voice it if that gentleman's wife had not nailed him with her eye.

"If people would only follow plain Church teaching that's what *I* always say," she began ponderously.

"The *Anglican* Church, I grant you," snapped Miss Simmonds, staring straight at Dr. Philbeach's unkempt moustache. "It's all this flirting with Dissent that's done the harm."

Mrs. Pringle looked as frightened as if she had witnessed an actual embrace, and the party dissolved in strident silence.

Chapter X

ONCE on the upward grade, Maurice gained strength daily. His depression gradually but steadily evaporated, and as Rachel came to know him better she realized how foreign to his nature it had been.

The blow Corisande had dealt him had seemed at the time a heavier one than his initial injury; but it is truer than we most of us care to confess, that we are never quite as happy or as unhappy as we think we are. With all his sensitive soul he had adored her beauty, and the vision of it had haunted the long months after he left her. But all the while at the back of his dreams, as he was now forced to realize, there had been something missing. More than one incident of the fortnight they had spent together, and after that little things that cropped up in her letters, would sometimes shout aloud that very common clay lay behind those deep blue eyes. She was only a child, he had told himself angrily. Once get her away from that fool of a mother, and she would be utterly different. And

so he had held on blindly till her last letter came, and the old tormenting voice had roared in his ears that he had been a fool all along. But for the time being that was no help. In his weakened physical state he ceased to think or reason; only the sense of loss remained, and for long dark hours at a stretch he had lain crushed by the intolerable longing to see her face again.

It was only lately, strangely enough since he had come to know this Mrs. Cassilis better, that he had realized what the total absence of all real companionship between two people living together might mean. How those diversities of feeling that had seemed no more than tiny stings would in time have grown into festering wounds. No, beauty only carried you half the way; you didn't need to see a person to be able to get on with them.

This Mrs. Cassilis, now, it was perfectly extraordinary how she always seemed to be in the same mood he was, instead of exactly the opposite as most people were. And then—well you could tell her things. He found himself talking to her as he had never talked to anyone in his life. Why he had even admitted that he had at times attempted to write poetry, and instead of laughing at him, she had made him repeat a line or two and seemed to

like them—or pretended she did. But somehow he didn't think there was much pretence about her.

He had guarded the secret like a crime since the black day when Archie had found him out and given him a "jolly good hiding." It had happened when he was nine years old, and Archie thirteen. He had been down at Greyladies by himself in quarantine after measles, and had spent his time pottering about the neglected garden, or sitting before the kitchen fire, listening to the housekeeper's endless legends about the house, till one day coming across a pencil and a piece of paper, both at the same time he had been moved to write a little poem about the ladies in grey and the grey carp in their fish pond. Afterwards he had lost the piece of paper, and in the excitement of his brother and sister's arrival, had forgotten all about it. Then, as ill-luck would have it, a day or two later Archie had found it, and after a tremendous lecture on effeminacy in general, had pronounced his sentence and proceeded to carry it into execution.

"Of course in a way I suppose he was right," Maurice had added, and then laughed at Rachel's passionate:

"The *brute!*" and a funny little choke in her voice. He had never known any one so tender-

hearted. She didn't seem to have any children. What a pity. She was just the sort of person you'd love to have for a mother.

The days slipped by in peaceful monotony. Soon Maurice could walk as far as the pine woods, and they fell into the habit of spending the morning there, rather than on the more frequented beach. Not that they had to complain of any excessive friendliness on the part of their compatriots—even the Philbeaches restricted themselves to a distant good morning, and Mrs. Pringle rushed past them as if they bore the visible signs of plague. For a day or two Rachel wondered what was the matter, and then forgot all about them and everybody else except herself and Maurice.

She had even ceased to think of his strange mistake about her age, except when some little thing came up to remind her. She really meant to enlighten him, she kept telling herself, but she let one chance after another go by, and when the time came it took her as much by surprise as it did Maurice.

One morning, when a drifting sea mist had kept them indoors, something in a newspaper set him talking about the South African War. He tried to remember the date of the Battle of Paardeberg, and appealed to Rachel.

"I'm afraid I'm rather hazy about it," she confessed. "We were in Paris most of the time; my mother was in a clinique, and I was in a pension entirely among French people, and so didn't hear much."

"That must have been pretty beastly. Were they horrid to you?"

"About the war? Oh dear, no. I remember occasional cries of 'Vive les Boers!' but I fancy most of the worst kind of abuse was confined to the Press. You see, I was only eight at the time, and French people are always good to children."

"Only eight!" exclaimed Maurice.

Rachel saw her mistake, but it was too late to retrieve it. "Yes"—she tried to speak in a matter-of-fact tone—"eight the November of '99." Her heart was beating violently, and her colour was coming and going. Maurice's colour had risen too.

"Then—then you're only thirty now. Two years younger than I am."

Rachel began to laugh, not very naturally. "How good you are at arithmetic. Why shouldn't I be?"

Maurice got redder. "I've been the most awful fool, you know," he said, uncomfortably. "I—I

imagined you were, well, forty-five to fifty. In fact, Patch said you were. Of course, I've sometimes thought, especially lately, that you were awfully young and jolly for your age."

Rachel went on laughing hysterically.

"Oh dear, oh dear, how very funny!"

But Maurice still didn't smile. Presently he heard her go out of the room. One by one things recurred to him which he had hardly noticed at the time. One day when he had put his hand on her arm, he remembered that it had struck him how firm and round and soft it was. And another time when she was reading aloud a letter from Archie, who invariably forgot that other eyes than Maurice's would see it, she had stumbled over something that sounded like "pretty secretaries are all the rage, so you're not the only one," which she boggled over as if the writing was not clear, and then had turned it into something quite different. And her laugh. What a double-dyed idiot he had been. And Patch, too, if it came to that. He could only suppose she had been so keen to get him off her hands with anybody that she hadn't taken proper stock of Mrs. Cassilis. Probably she had looked pretty cheap with living with those relations. He himself had gone by her dull toneless voice, and

slow tired movements, when he had first known her. By Jove, there was a difference in her now. You didn't have to see her to know it. Looking back on his misty recollections of her at Crampton, it was difficult to believe she was the same person.

Well, there it was; and after all what was there to get excited about? They had lived up to now perfectly comfortably, why not go on exactly the same? She obviously didn't mind it, she was much too sensible. The old nonsense about roping off one sex from the other, as if they were wolves and lambs, had surely been done away with by the war. She was just the jolliest friend he had ever had, and he hoped—he was sure—that she felt just the same about him. Besides, what on earth would become of him without her? He took out a cigarette, but found his match-box was empty, and, getting up, began to wander about the room in search of another. Twice he stumbled against chairs, and once upset something containing liquid. He could hear it dripping on the linoleum, and hoped it wasn't ink. He called Brewster, but got no reply. Why had Mrs. Cassilis gone away like that? She always told him when she was going away, and looked to see that everything he wanted was within reach. He called Brewster again, without result.

A horrible sense of his own helplessness seized him. Suppose he should always be like this? Always at the mercy of servants. Brewster was a good little fellow, but, as his master very well knew, would be slack enough if Mrs. Cassilis were not always after him. Suppose she got sick of the job and went away? Patch had only talked about engaging her for a few months. And after that? He might, of course, be able to see by then, though he hadn't much hope of it himself. In that case there would be no need to have anyone to write his letters and read to him, or to tell Brewster about things; but it wasn't only that Mrs. Cassilis did. Suddenly, he felt that life without Mrs. Cassilis would be emptied of a good many things.

The shock of the last discovery drove him to his feet again. Where the devil were those matches? This time he found them by knocking them off the table, and banged his forehead violently in trying to pick them up. The door opened, and Rachel came in just as it happened. She ran to him, exclaiming: "Oh, what are you trying to do?"—just as if it were not all her fault.

Maurice assumed an air of extreme pathos.

"I found myself all alone," he said, "and then, when I tried to find the matches, I upset something.

I could hear it dripping on the floor, but I couldn't do anything. I say, don't go away from me again."

"I won't," said Rachel in a low voice as she staunched the tears of ink that bedewed the face of one of the yellow flannel sunflowers.

Nothing more was said about her age and outwardly, at any rate, their life pursued its normal course.

One day in the following week, as they were having tea, Maurice began to complain that his meals came at all sorts of hours, and were more often than not half cold. Complaints only did any good for about a couple of days. In future, he announced, he should lunch and dine downstairs. Brewster was to get out his dress-clothes—a smoker. The day had been wet, and he wanted a change.

Rachel concluded that he was getting over his dislike of exhibiting his disabilities, and welcomed it accordingly, only wondering why he thought it necessary to give so many reasons. It would be much more fun having him down to meals, instead of eating a solitary dinner with a book propped up against the water-bottle. In honour of the occasion she put on a grey dress which she had not

worn, and pinned a spray of heliotrope in the front.

She found Maurice waiting for her when she went into the sitting-room. "I say, isn't this fun?" he exclaimed. "You must take my arm to-night. I wonder what you are wearing. Something very smart, I can tell by the feel. It's chiffon, isn't it? Or is it georgette? Archie would know for certain. I wonder what colour it is—no, don't tell me, I'll guess. You're wearing heliotrope, so it must be either mauve or grey."

He rattled on all through dinner. Rachel had never seen him so gay. All went swimmingly. Brewster, who had arrived at some sort of *modus vivendi* with the head waiter, brought him his food ready cut up, and then took his stand behind his chair, deftly whisking glasses out of the way of disaster.

Maurice's appearance naturally caused a small stir among the other diners, which did not decrease as dinner progressed, and the couple were observed to laugh and talk with an animation and interest in each other, more suggestive of a casual encounter than the termination of a whole day boxed up together in a small sitting-room. By the time they finished dinner, the other guests had grouped themselves round tables in the *salon,* and settled down to

cards or newspapers. Rachel was conscious of a cold wind of hostility blowing from the English quarter of the room. She suggested having their coffee upstairs, but Maurice seemed possessed by an insatiable thirst for dissipation and elected to have it among his kind. So there was no help for it, and as long as their fellow-countrywomen contented themselves with looking disagreeable, nothing much would come of it.

The waiter had put their coffee on a table near the stout Portuguese lady, Madame Fonseca, and her soldier son. Through an interchange of courtesies about a chair, Maurice got into conversation with the latter. Madame knew no English, and though she professed a knowledge of French, seemed to have little to offer Rachel except slow smiles, and swayings of her head. Tenente Fonseca, however, more than atoned for his mother's lack of small talk. He began the usual inquiries as to how Maurice had been injured.

"Got mixed up with a bomb," the latter told him shortly.

"A revolution, of course. You 'ave them too in England? I did not know."

"No, India; only a potty little riot."

Tenente Fonseca clicked his tongue in the roof

of his mouth, and shook his head much as his mother did.

"'Ard lines," he finally brought out in triumph, staring at Maurice's mask as if he were trying to discern some hidden horridness.

"Oh, it's nothing much," said Maurice hastily. "What are you in, cavalry? I'm ashamed to say I know nothing of your Army. I wasn't in France during the end part of the war."

"Nor I either. My mother she say it is bad for 'er 'ealth. She ask our medicine. 'E say 'e sign a paper saying I am too weak. So I go not. You see," he lowered his voice, "we are Monarchist. I draw not my spade for this Republic."

The little warrior drew himself up and jerked down the front of his tunic, but his auditor remained more mystified than impressed.

"Your—I beg your pardon."

"My espada, épée, you know. You 'ave not in your army, no?"

"Yes, yes," said Maurice, "of course, how stupid of me. What's the matter with the Republic?"

Tenente Fonseca spread out his hands in an all-embracing sweep.

"Is 'orrible this Republic," he pronounced with gloomy finality.

Maurice felt unequal to a political discussion, so he said hurriedly:

"The country seems all right. It's a perfect climate; this is the first really bad day we've had since we came. And the people we meet about here are most awfully nice. They'll go to any sort of trouble if you ask them a question."

The bright black eyes, so like a monkey's in their quickness and timidity, sparkled with pleasure.

"You like Portugal, yes? Is a beautiful countree."

"Well, I do. I like it immensely, the little I know of it."

Rachel became aware that Brewster was making agitated signals to her through the glass door, and crossed the room to speak to him.

"Is very well, your wife," remarked Fonseca, cordially. "Is charmingly pretty."

Maurice started slightly.

"Oh, er, Mrs. Cassilis, I suppose you mean? She's my secretary."

There was a heavy pause, while the other registered yet one more proof of the unblushing hypocrisy of the English. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled the smile of a man of the world.

"You need not fear my mother will 'ear. She

does not understand us," he whispered encouragingly. "She comes with you on the journey? You meet her in London? Ah, London." He rolled his eyes, overpowered by the potency of his reminiscences. "London," he exclaimed lyrically, "that is the place. There was a little girl I met with once in London. . . ."

But Maurice was not listening. For the last week he had been a prey to an increasing desire to know what Rachel looked like. So Fonseca thought her "char-ming-ly pretty." The devil he did! Perhaps it was his idea of being civil, but he had certainly spoken with a good deal of conviction. Dash it all, it was no business of his. It was evidently high time that he, Maurice, got about more and looked after her a bit, instead of leaving her among all these bounders who probably hadn't seen a lady before. He could hear her talking to some man now—not Dr. Philbeach. The man, whoever he was, had stopped her on her way back to him. When they got upstairs again he would just make her tell him if she had had any bother already. What was the idiot saying to her now? Something about "reading to Captain Bannister?" No, hang it all that was a bit too thick. He was unpleasantly reminded of scenes he had

witnessed on P. and O. liners, when he had seen young children skilfully made use of as an introduction to their pretty mother's good graces. Damn it, he would not play the obliging baby.

Rachel was beside him now, introducing a Mr. Whittaker, who was offering to lend them books. He had heard Mrs. Cassilis reading aloud on the sands, might he sometimes take her place? Well, at any rate, he hoped he might come round some evening and bring some of his books. He did a certain amount of reviewing, so had many sent him. Did Captain Bannister care for the Scandinavian school? No, Captain Bannister did not. He thought them all vulgar, affected bores, and was afraid it was time to go to bed. He was extremely obliged to Mr. Whittaker, but he thought they had still got a good deal left of the stock they had brought out with them. Good night.

Rachel had never conceived he could be so ungracious, and to make amends asked poor Mr. Whittaker to lend his books to her. She, for her part, had the greatest admiration for the Scandinavians. Had he by chance got Nexö's latest? He had, and it was hers. She should have it to-morrow without fail.

Maurice almost dragged her away.

"What on earth made that bounder think we wanted him?" he demanded excitedly when they reached the sitting-room.

"He only wanted to be amiable, I think," said Rachel mildly. "He seems lonely now his friend has left. His sciatica is bad, and he can't get about much. It appears he was within earshot the other morning when I was reading that book of sagas, and so took us for kindred spirits."

"Old, is he?" queried Maurice.

Rachel began to laugh.

"About as old as you thought I was—fiftyish."

Maurice blushed.

"I say, you needn't rub it in. It was as much Patch's fault as mine."

"Well, anyhow, you needn't have been so horrid to the poor man. Last week you'd have thought him a very suitable crony for me."

"Well, I don't now," said Maurice obstinately. "And look here, I want you to tell me if you have any trouble with any of these outsiders. I ought never to have let you go down to meals alone. Lord knows who comes to these sort of places. That little Fonseca, now, if he tries any nonsense mind you're to tell me at once."

"My dear child, go to bed," said Rachel mimick-

ing her most elderly manner. "Because I'm not fifty, doesn't mean I'm five. Half my life has been spent in foreign hotels, and believe me as far as this one goes, it and its inhabitants couldn't very well be duller."

"I do wish you'd be serious," her protector groaned. "After all, who have you got to look after you if it isn't me?"

"Myself," retorted Rachel. "And here's Brewster, come to see how much longer you intend to continue the evening's dissipation."

"Will you have luncheon served here to-morrow, sir?" the man asked.

"No," said his master with decision, "in future, I shall have all my meals downstairs."

Rachel laughed.

Chapter XI

IN her room, Rachel stood for a long time looking out of the window. The rain had ceased some hours earlier, and now, in a star-sown sky, the moon sailed high over the quivering, shimmering sea. It seemed hardly darker than the day. Away to the right round the horn of the coast, each little white village lay like a pearl in a jade setting of pine trees. Beyond them the light at the mouth of the river glowed like a fire-fly. A faint night wind crept into the room, bringing a burden of scent from the flowering laurels in the garden below.

Rachel drew in a long breath, which was half a sob and half a laugh. Was it all the magic of the night that even Senhor X.'s marzipan château took on a measure of romance? If only Maurice could see it too, just he and she, and all the rest of the world asleep. She leant out a little further and looked along to his windows. He was getting stronger every day. He would see soon, she was sure of it. What a change in him this last week.

No more tamely submitting to her decisions because it was too much trouble to argue them—now he positively ordered her about.

Her eyes danced and her dimple came and went, as she thought of the incident of poor Mr. Whittaker. On looking back at it she was surprised that it had not annoyed her. Maurice had really behaved very badly, and she supposed she ought to have been cross with him. But she wasn't—no certainly she wasn't.

Away down on the shore the little waves were dissolving on the sand with soft splashes. Rachel listened and wondered if Maurice could hear them too.

Yes, unquestionably his will power was returning, and then: "When he *wanted* to see he *would* see," she had said it a hundred times to herself, and more than once in writing to Mrs. Reval. But to-night for the first time the full meaning of it dawned on her. It might be any day now, and then. . . . She drew in her breath quickly with a little gasp like pain. Her part would be done then. He would have no further use for her. She would go away and never see him again.

"I can't, I can't," she whispered with trembling lips as she turned away from the window. "He

can't do without me—at least not yet." To-morrow was surely hers, and perhaps the next day.

She presently fell asleep and dreamt that she and Maurice were walking through the pine wood, but there was an unfamiliarity about it that frightened her, and she was filled with a shuddering sense of something unseen that was drawing nearer and nearer. She became aware that she was not holding Maurice's elbow and guiding him as she usually did, but that instead his arm was round her, holding her close. His mask was gone, and yet, strange to say, his face as he turned it towards her was perfectly familiar. He seemed utterly unconscious of the danger that oppressed her, and when she tried to warn him, her voice died in her throat. Suddenly it came, Edward's face, with its slack red lips, and bright, rather prominent blue eyes, grinning through the trees, closer and closer till it almost touched her. She woke with a strangled scream in her throat, to find the sun streaming into the room, and the stolid chambermaid standing beside her holding a tray in one hand while she crossed herself with the other.

The nightmare still hung on her as she dressed. She had had nothing of the kind since she left England—should she never shake off these terrors?

This dream had been different from the other dreams. Before she had always faced Edward alone. Recollection sent the hot blood flooding her forehead. She bit her lips hard and finished dressing quickly.

Rather to her relief Maurice was not in the sitting-room. The post lay on the table, and on the top of the other letters, the hatefully familiar envelope which she knew contained the report from the asylum. She had a hazy idea that last month's had never reached her at all, and realized with a slight shock that she had never missed it. Well, this one could wait. It was always the same. She pushed the new one aside and took up Maurice's letters. As she did so he came into the room.

"Will you have your letters or the papers first?" she asked, as he dropped limply into his chair.

"What is there?"

"*The Times,* the *Field,* two business letters and one from your sister."

Maurice moved his head uneasily against the cushion.

"Shall we go out?" she proposed as he did not answer. He had not had one of these moods for a very long time, and this morning she felt singularly unfitted to cope with it.

"I don't really care if we stay in or go out," he announced.

"You've got a headache, haven't you? I'll get some eau-de-Cologne." Maurice made no objection. He was rarely insensible to a little petting.

"I couldn't sleep, I don't know why," he said presently. "I say, would you mind keeping your hand just where you've got it now?"

Rachel began to talk a little at random.

"That little Mrs. Pringle coughs all night. . . . I'll go and see if I can get her to inhale or something if I hear her again."

"Why on earth should you? One of her own long-toothed friends can perfectly well look after her, instead of dragging you out of bed. Some people are so beastly selfish. Don't move your hand."

"I don't think there are any of them on this landing except the son, and he certainly wouldn't bestir himself."

"I daresay you'd be glad enough of a change of jobs. You must be getting pretty sick of nothing but me all day. I was thinking about it last night, when I couldn't sleep. Why not go out for a walk with old Whittaker, and leave me in, or Brewster can take me."

"Are you by any chance trying to get rid of me on to somebody else?" Rachel tried to laugh with tears in her voice.

"You know perfectly well I don't mean that, it's only that I can't help thinking sometimes how beastly dull it must be for you. I say, your hand's pretty shaky this morning. . . . Have you got a cold?"

"If you can do nothing but talk nonsense, I shall read your letters to you and then we will go out," said Rachel desperately.

"All right, if you insist. Don't bother to read them all through—just tell me anything I ought to know. I wish Patch would leave us in peace."

Maurice seemed to care less and less for news of his family; he took far more interest in such of Rachel's letters as she sometimes read him.

She ran her eyes over the two business communications, and told him the contents, neither required an answer. Mrs. Reval's was full of her own doings—the name of a certain Charlesworth, cropping up at frequent intervals. "Patch is going to marry him when she's got time," Maurice had once remarked. Then followed a long complaint of Archie, who had got himself mixed up with a half-caste woman, Brazilian or something of that sort, any-

how, frightfully expensive. Their father was furious, but Archie seemed perfectly demented. There followed a graphic description of the forms his dementia was taking. Rachel was wondering if she was expected to render these literally, but Maurice stopped her at the outset.

"Let's get out into the woods," he exclaimed impatiently. "Archie's a damned fool, and if Patch can't keep him out of mischief, at least she needn't inflict his exploits on you. I wish, when you write, you'd tell her so from me."

They found a sheltered sunny spot and spread a rug. Neither had spoken much on the way, and as soon as they were settled, Rachel with her back against a tree, and Maurice full length on the rug beside her, she opened the papers and began to read. But she was soon aware that he was not listening and thought he had gone to sleep.

Maurice, however, was far from sleep. He was deeply engaged in wondering what sort of a man the late Mr. Cassilis had been, and if his wife had been very much in love with him. He could never remember her mentioning him, which might either mean that she had loved him or had hated him so deeply that the sound of his name was now unbearable. Maurice ungenerously but fervently hoped

that the latter was the case. He somehow hated the idea of the contrary, just as much as he disliked her bothering with old Whittaker, or anybody but himself. He was afraid he had hurt her feelings about that, but it would mean she wouldn't do it again. What a beast he'd been, now he came to think of it. It was all because he wanted to make sure that she wasn't sick of it and wanted to leave him. . . . But that fellow Cassilis, now, it was odd she never spoke of him. She talked constantly about her life with her doctor-ridden mother and afterward with the Morlands, but about the ten years that lay between she maintained the most absolute silence, and all he had been able to piece together, was that she had lived in London and known a great many literary and artistic people. Most probably the husband had been killed in the war,—very likely a good thing on the whole. He seemed to have left her badly off, though she must have had money at one time. Probably ran through it all, selfish beast, and left her to struggle through as best she could. He, Maurice, would see to it that she never wanted for anything again. Supposing his sight came back, there was simply no question of her going to another job. If he went back to India, he would persuade her to go to Greyladies and

look after it for him. There was really no reason why it should be let. He had always hated the idea of strangers being there, and on the other hand had always felt a sort of link between her and the old house. It would be good to come back on leave and find her there, instead of going to Watersmeeting, to be growled at by his father, hustled by Archie, and very likely before he knew it, married to some one he didn't want, by Patch. No, he would say nothing about it to the others, but would quietly install Rachel at Greyladies as caretaker, and when he came home they could go on exactly as they did here. He would get a dog-cart and a good mare, not a beastly motor, and they would go for long drives over heaths and through deep lanes.

He felt so happy that he really dozed off at last, and began to dream it all over again. He was lying under the old apple tree in the orchard, and heard Rachel telling him that it was time to wake up and go into lunch. In another moment he would open his eyes and look up into her face, but he would let her speak again because he liked to hear her voice. She spoke, and he opened his eyes, but only on the blank of everyday.

The shock was bewildering. He put his hand to

his head and encountered his mask. It was rather like falling out of a tree as he had done once when he was little, just as he thought he had found a fairy's nest.

Chapter XII

THEY passed a rather silent day, and for once Maurice seemed glad of Fonseca's company after dinner. He was not aware as Rachel was, that Madame Fonseca, after staring at her stolidly for a minute and a half, gave her the briefest possible bow, and turning her broad back on her rolled away to the other side of the room. Rachel told herself that she was hardened to this sort of thing by now. It had begun with the English and was now spreading to the Portuguese. As long as none of it reached Maurice, she was quite indifferent to what they thought. Heavens, what was it all compared with leaving him?

"Aunt Fanny's in bed with a temp. so I'm going to talk to you," came a shrill voice behind her.

She turned and saw Daisy Carter, Miss Simmond's niece, balancing herself on the edge of a table. She was so like a small fat Shetland pony, that it seemed something of a feat.

"Do you know that I've spoken to you twice, and you've never heard me?"

Rachel coloured a little.

"I was listening to Senhor Fonseca, I suppose." Daisy flopped down on a chair beside her.

"You call yourself Captain Bannister's secretary, don't you?" she asked, fixing Rachel with a wide-eyed stare.

"I *am* his secretary," the other replied with what dignity she could muster, painfully conscious of her inquisitor's imperviousness to snubs.

Daisy laughed good-humouredly.

"Well, of course, I'm bound to say you don't look like one. You're much too well dressed, and too—what shall I say?—not inky enough. Those old tabbies, Mrs. Philbeach and Mrs. Pringle, and of course Aunt Fanny the worst, are fearfully intrigued about you, but I think you're perfectly sweet. I made up my mind I should talk to you the first time I got a chance. I have to be a bit careful when Aunt Fanny's about, because you see she's paying for me being here. I expect they'll go and tell her about it to-morrow, but I shall just say it was you who spoke to me. I say, aren't they exactly like the Mad Hatter and the Dormouse in *Alice?* Mrs. Philbeach with those awful teeth,

and Mrs. Pringle, always mumbling crumbs like a rabbit. It's a blessing to have you to look at. Have a choc.?"

"You're very kind."

"Well, you see, I'm not their generation, thank the Lord, and I don't see things the way they do. I think it's just splendid of you to come away like this with Captain Bannister, now he's blind. Only promise me you won't spoil it all by going and getting married. A friend of mine says marriage is such a cliché. Of course I shall have to be, because we're all frightfully churchy, but I don't care about it a bit. That's why I wanted to talk to you. You see I've never met anybody . . ."

"You don't seem to understand," interrupted Rachel desperately. Maurice, thank goodness, was deep in cavalry tactics. "Captain Bannister's sister engaged me to act as his secretary while he is abroad. Please don't run away with any other idea."

Daisy surveyed her dubiously, and put another chocolate in her mouth, then she nodded intelligently.

"Of course you have to say that. But you see you needn't mind a bit with me. I haven't any prejudices. I think he's a perfect darling.

He must be a dream without that mask."

"I really don't know," said Rachel uncomfortably. "I've never seen him without it. I didn't know him before he was hurt."

Daisy's eyes opened their widest, and her mouth likewise.

"*What?* Do you mean to tell me that you've never pulled it up a tiny bit to see underneath? *I* should have done ages ago."

At this moment Fonseca, unable to ignore his mother's signals of disapproval any longer, took his leave, and before Rachel could intervene, Daisy slipped into his place, and Mr. Whittaker into hers. She could only hope for the best.

"I'm Daisy Carter," the girl began. "I say, may I take you out one day? I did heaps of nursing in the war, and I'll be ever so careful."

Maurice smiled. He didn't think Mrs. Cassilis would let him out of her sight. She was dreadfully strict.

"I shall ask her. I'm sure she won't mind. . . . I'm so sick of nothing but Percy Pringle all day long."

"I've just been talking to her, Mrs. Cassilis, I mean," Daisy continued. "I think she is just the sweetest thing in the world, don't you?"

"She's very good to me," said Maurice lamely.

"I think she's perfectly lovely."

Maurice lowered his voice, though he tried to speak as if he were only humouring his companion.

"I wish you'd tell me what she's like. You see I've never seen her."

"Of course you haven't. How perfectly sweet. I never heard anything so adorable. She's never seen you without that black thing, and you've never seen her at all. Don't you know a *bit* what she's like?"

"How can I?"

Daisy tossed her bobbed mane, and shook the box of chocolates encouragingly under his nose.

"Go on eating while I tell you. No? Then I will. To begin with she's tall, and what novelists call slender, you know the right kind of thinness, and her hair is soft and very, very fair. I should think it curls naturally. Then her eyes are big and grey, the light sort with dark rims, and her eyebrows and eyelashes are a good deal darker than her hair. Her nose isn't anything one way or the other, it's just a nose, but her mouth is simply the most delicious curly thing you ever saw, with a dimple at the corner of it when she laughs. Let me see, what have I forgotten? Oh her hands—those long pale

fingers like you see in pictures. Aren't I a good describer?"

Maurice said something which sounded like "yes, very." He was looking along a flagged path, bordered with lavender bushes. A tall, fair-haired woman was coming down it, towards him.

Daisy flounced round on her chair.

"I've been telling Captain Bannister what you look like," she said indignantly to Rachel, "and he isn't even listening."

"I think he's tired," she answered. She leant forward, putting her hand on his knee. "Shall we go?"

He rose to his feet and took her arm without replying.

They reached the sitting-room in silence. By the door, Maurice who was nearest to it, put out his hand, and felt for the electric-light switch. It squeaked loudly, but no light came.

"What's happened?" he stammered, in an odd bewildered voice. "I say, you know something *has* happened."

Rachel began to tremble violently. For a moment she could do nothing but cling to his arm. Then with an effort she put her hand into his pocket, and taking out his match-box struck a match.

The flame burnt upwards in her shaking fingers.

Maurice dropped into a chair, his head in his hands.

"I can see," he said in a low voice.

As the match went out Rachel burst into tears.

The moon which had been hidden behind a cloud came forth again and poured a flood of silver light through the open window, showing Maurice the dim outline of the shaking figure beside him. He took one of the hands in his, a beautiful hand, as that girl had said—and stroked it.

"Do you care as much as that?" he asked shakily.

She could only answer by her fingers. For a moment he went on stroking her hand, and then he stooped and kissed it. Rachel caught it back with a faint gasp.

"I'll tell Brewster you want him," she said, as she ran out of the room.

She waited for a moment outside the door to steady herself and then called Brewster. His master must on no account leave off his mask, she reminded him. The thicknesses of gauze must be removed one by one, or he might overstrain his sight. Brewster was much too excited to listen.

"I wish we'd had his hair cut yesterday," was his first comment. "The barber'd better come first

thing in the morning afore he notices it's a bit long. And I'd be obliged if you'd get me another bottle of benzine, ma'am, an' I'll go over all his coats. There'll be a work with him if he finds any spots we've overlooked. Very particular gentleman he always was."

Rachel smiled drearily as she went into her own room.

Brewster, too, saw it mainly from his own point of view. . . . Oh, but she was glad, of course she was. Wasn't it what she had longed for and worked for all these weeks?

She looked at the hand Maurice had kissed. . . . It didn't mean anything . . . a man might do anything at such a moment. But hadn't the time come when she ought to tell him about Edward? Ought she not to have told him long ago?

For long hours after she had put out the light, she lay sobbing with a silk sock she had been mending, pressed against her cheek.

Maurice also lay awake, too profoundly happy even to wish for sleep. At first when he had heard what his fate might be, he had made up his mind to face the worst, and except in those moments of extreme optimism peculiar to people of his tempera-

ment, he had set himself to grow accustomed if not resigned to his present life. He would go down to Greyladies when he went back to England, and of course take Rachel with him. With her help he would set about to become as clever as lots of other blind people. It wouldn't be much of a life for a man of his age, but it wouldn't be unendurable. That was to say, if Rachel stayed with him. But she would, he was sure she would. He would put it to her one of these days.

But for the last week or so the other alternative had presented itself more and more frequently. Suppose his sight came back? God! it would be good to be with the old regiment again! to see the handsome, impassive faces of his troop, with their hawk-like noses, and black fan-shaped beards. To feel a horse move under him again. . . . To join in the rush and scurry of the game he loved the best of all. . . . With all due modesty, he knew that the polo team without him must be a thing of naught. Finally to be a man once more among other men, not a beggar for small services that a child would scorn.

And yet to-night, when it seemed pretty certain that all this was once more his, it was not of the regiment or the polo that he thought. If he were

not going to be blind for the rest of his life, what about Rachel? It was not customary for junior regimental officers to employ secretaries. He remembered his plan of asking her to live at Greyladies. He had been very pleased with it this morning, but now he discarded it at once. What, see her only for a few weeks every two years? He wanted to see her every day and always now he *could* see her. It was no use; he couldn't possibly live without her. He loved her—loved her in a way he had never conceived it possible to love anybody, not even Corisande; certainly not Corisande. There he had been overcome by a pretty face, but there had always been that subconscious discord. Rachel was his other self. They were the twain who in the Hindu legend, meet and part and meet again, seeking each other always through countless lives, to be united at last and for ever when perfection shall be gained. How blind, how much blinder than his eyes, his heart had been that he had not discovered it long ago.

But after all hadn't he always known it, right away from the very beginning, even when he had thought of her as an elderly woman? Hadn't she always brought him that entirely satisfying sense of having found something he had been looking for all

his life? And Rachel? He told himself she too cared for him. Look how upset she had been when he told her that he could see. Nobody else would care as much as she did. Patch would be immensely relieved not to have to make any more plans for him. Archie would say "Good egg," and his father? Well, his father would probably be glad that people would now stop boring him about his "poor son." But Rachel—God bless her—had wept for joy.

Chapter XIII

THE tide was coming in, breaking in loud crashes among the fast disappearing rocks, as the sea advanced higher and higher on the ochre sands. Beyond, but not very far away, a big liner was advancing slowly and relentlessly, like a steam-roller, till it presently passed out of sight round the great headland that rose sheer from the water's edge. When it was quite gone, Rachel told herself, she would speak.

She was sitting with her knees drawn up, chin on hand, in the shadow of a rock. Beside her lay Maurice, raised on one elbow; idly playing with the fringe of the rug. During the drive he had been very silent, but as Rachel felt, extraordinarily happy. He had whistled a gay little tune, and once, when they turned on to the sea road and had met the thyme-laden breeze, he had broken off to exclaim: "Good God! I never knew how good it was to be alive before."

He had been in this mood all morning, laughing at every discovery he made of things she had

described to him, nearly falling out of the window in an effort to see Mrs. Philbeach, asleep in the garden with her hat on one side and her mouth open, but under all this bubbling high spirits a happiness that was too deep for outward showing. In desperation she had planned this picnic, which gave her a multitude of small excuses for keeping out of his way, less he should feel her lack of response, but all the while she packed the basket and gave directions to Brewster and the waiters, he had hung about her, as she knew too well, devouring her with his eyes.

And now, with half a dozen words she was going to kill all this joy.

As the last fragment of the black hull vanished, she moistened her lips.

"Have you ever wondered why I never said anything about my married life?" she asked, hoping that her voice sounded less unnatural to him than it did in her own ears. Maurice started slightly.

"Ye—es," he said, after a minute's silence. "Your husband was killed in the war, wasn't he?"

Rachel's heart was beating violently; cold hands seemed to wipe all the warmth from her face.

"No," she said, in a low voice. "He wasn't killed; he's still alive."

Maurice sat up abruptly. She could see that he

had gone very white under his brown skin. When he spoke he did so with elaborate calmness.

"I suppose he went off with some other woman. Don't tell me about it, if you'd rather not. But—but couldn't you divorce him?"

"No," whispered Rachel. Her voice had gone altogether now. "It wasn't that. He's mad. He's in an asylum."

She stared straight before her, at the cruel, thoughtless beauty of the sea, at the myriads of sand-flies, at a little lizard making its way up the sunny side of the rock. At anything, and anywhere, rather than the silent, motionless figure beside her.

The sea had reached the farthest of the rocks, encircling it with two long white arms of foam, the little lizard had long ago rejoined his wife and family, and then at last Maurice moved a hand and took one of hers in a shaking, convulsive grip that hurt her.

Slowly and haltingly she began to tell the story of her married life. How Edward had come down to Crampton to contest a by-election and had sought relief from the unsympathetic attitude of the electors in making love to the prettiest girl among the families of his supporters. She, on her side, had

been easily dazzled by his facile good manners and amusing talk, so different from the men around her. His position at the Bar—he was already a minor celebrity in criminal cases—looked dazzling when viewed from Crampton, but more than anything else he offered an escape from the detested Morley Edge.

One soft May evening he had proposed to her among Mrs. Morland's carefully trained rose bushes, while from the open windows of the drawing-room came the strains of Enid, trampling the life out of the Moonlight Sonata on the pianola. He had kissed her, and she had been dimly aware that she disliked it. Perhaps it was natural that a man should be rather wild and excited at such a time. She was very glad when he at last consented to go back to the house and inform her relations, who greeted them with smiles of pleased expectancy. After that everybody had contributed to hurry things forward, and in the rush and whirl of clothes and a house to get, besides all the hundred and one aspects of a wholly new life, she had hardly time to realize a certain flatness and nervousness in herself, and a disinclination to find herself too much alone with Edward. The Morlands expressed an almost extravagant esteem for him, though if he

had married anybody else, they might have been more alive to his superciliousness, and very obvious desire to have as little to do with them as possible, but as it was they were convinced that Rachel who "hasn't our feeling about family ties," was alone responsible for the fact that they hardly ever saw him again. Even now it was almost impossible to convince them that there could be anything seriously wrong about a man who was making such a good income.

Of the ten years that followed, Rachel said little. There had been a gradual but steady change in Edward. His fancy for her quickly cooled into something that was nearer dislike than indifference. Little oddnesses which he had always had became more marked, and what had been occasional irritability gave place to frequent and wholly unreasonable fits of fury. A series of what had been euphemistically called nervous breakdowns had followed, until finally. . . . "Well, they *had* to see it," she broke off.

Maurice had listened in silence, but as she finished the tension of his fingers relaxed, though he still held her hand.

"You didn't love him, then?" he asked in a low voice.

"No," Rachel answered. "I see now that I never did, even at first. I didn't know what it was," she added simply.

Maurice said nothing. He lifted her hand very gently and kissed it as he had done the night before.

"Is there no way out?" he asked at length.

"None, he may live for years. His health is very good."

Maurice rose to his feet as if driven to movement by an instinct of escape from his present misery. He strode forward heedlessly, fortunately striking a track of clear sand. Rachel watched him go with dull eyes.

The sun had dipped till it nearly touched the water, turning it to a molten lake. A chill wind had sprung up fluttering her thin silk blouse.

Away on the road she heard the occasional tinkle of a bell which told her that the cab had come to fetch them, but she made no movement. A kind of deadly lethargy had fallen on her. She was only conscious that she was very, very tired. Everything and everybody seemed a long way off. She longed to go to sleep, somewhere down near the water's edge, where the sea would come and carry her away, and she would never wake again. Her eyes closed, and then opened suddenly.

"Rachel!" Maurice had called.

It was the first time he had used her name. He was close to her on the other side of the rock. She sprang to her feet and ran to him. He caught her hands and held them in a frightened grasp.

"Come home," she said. "It's cold now the sun's gone. . . ."

The cabman was plodding towards them over the heavy sand. He gathered up the rug and the luncheon basket, and went on ahead. Rachel looked round her as people sometimes do when leaving a room in which they have been very ill. Then automatically taking Maurice by the arm, they made their way slowly to the carriage.

Neither of them spoke during the long drive through the gathering gloom. The sea had turned from copper to lead, and was lashing the rocks with angry cries. Every now and then a bigger wave than its fellows would top the cliff, and the wind would carry a scud of spray across their faces. Overhead a dark bird whirled and screamed.

"There's going to be the devil of a storm," the driver remarked cheerfully.

In her thick coat Rachel still shivered. She felt as if she would never be warm again. When they came within the radius of the hotel lights, she saw

that Maurice's face looked tired and drawn, and wore that peculiar grey pallor common to very dark people. But when she asked him if he was cold, he denied it.

"We'd better go down to dinner?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yes, yes," Rachel answered.

Chapter XIV

FOR some days they outwardly continued their ordinary life, but fearfully and gropingly, as if they feared that a stray step would carry them over a precipice of which they were perpetually conscious but could not see. Rachel read aloud till she could read no more, often going over the same page twice unnoticed by either of them. At meal-times they talked unceasingly and ofter incoherently of the news that came in the papers, or of anything and everything rather than let one of those terribly speaking silences intervene. Afterwards they would join the other visitors, who were suspicious and rather resentful of this sudden sociability.

Before long Rachel came to be very grateful to Mr. Whittaker. Of all the men he seemed to be the only one that Maurice could endure, and having no other claims on him, was always ready for a walk or an argument. It was a relief to her when she could leave them together, and listen to Daisy Carter, prattling to some giggling, open-mouthed Portuguese

girls of how she and her generation were reforming the world, or she would ask Mrs. Pringle to show her a crochet pattern. The latter was not at all averse to displaying her acquirements in this art, but was hampered by her fear of incurring the censure of Miss Simmonds and the chaplain's wife. Mrs. Cassilis, too, in spite of her professed eagerness to learn, proved both stupid and inattentive. Mrs. Pringle laughed very heartily when she heard Mr. Whittaker refer to her as a clever woman.

And so the days wore themselves out somehow, interspersed by the long sleepless nights. It couldn't go on, Rachel told herself a hundred times in the twenty-four hours, but how to end it? Maurice's sight had returned, but in nothing like the measure she had imagined when he had first told her he could see. Except for finding his way about, he declared he could do nothing for himself, nor did he seem to get any better. It must be the strain he was under that was keeping him back. She must leave him, there was nothing else for it. She would tell Mrs. Reval that urgent family affairs had recalled her to England, and suggest that for a time at any rate Mr. Whittaker should take her place.

But then came the question of what she was to say to Maurice. He, too, would have to be told

something that would make it all easy, something that made it quite simple for her to go away without its hurting him too much—above all things, without his guessing how much it hurt her. But at this her common sense would revolt. It was many weeks too late for anything like that. And the old tormenting questions would begin all over again. One thing remained clear. However she left him, it must be in such a way that everything between them was broken off for ever. If he was to be happy, she must go out of his life so entirely that in time he would forget her. Once he returned to his own life, with its incessant round of pleasures and interests—yes, and its hundreds of charming women. . . . No, no, he would never forget her. No one could cut whole months out of their memories. Surely it was enough to wish that he should be happy again?

One afternoon she made a slight cold the pretext for sending him out with Mr. Whittaker, telling herself that by the time they came back she would have made up her mind what she was going to do, for she felt that Maurice too was approaching a conclusion, and she dreaded of all things that she might have to argue it.

She would have to be very cheerful, very cool and rather hard about it, she told herself, and bit

her trembling lips. She was watching them go down the road, Maurice with his long stride, and little Mr. Whittaker, limping and half running to keep up with him. Maurice must see pretty well to be able to walk like that. He swung his stick and struck at a geranium blossom hanging over a wall, neatly severing its head. The conviction darted across her that he could see very much better than he would admit. Oh, poor darling, he was making a pretence of blindness because he knew how hard it would make it to leave him, the pitiful little comedy that he played at every meal, his insistence on his inability to do anything for himself, was all to that end. Poor, poor darling. A sobbing laugh rose in her throat as she thought of how only this morning he had deliberately poured his coffee on his plate instead of his cup, and then called her attention to it.

Brewster came in and asked her a question which she answered without turning round. As the door closed behind him she left the window and went over to the table on which he had left the post. There might be an answer to a letter she had written on Maurice's behalf, asking for details of a horse which a friend wished to sell. If it had come it would give him something to think about. But

there was nothing for him except the newspapers.

She looked through her own correspondence, and to her surprise found a letter addressed by her uncle. She had not often heard from them, though her aunt had written letters of mild complaint that she should have gone so far away, and had told them nothing about the people she was with. Her uncle hadn't written to her three times in her life. It must be something about business. Probably the asylum people had raised their fees again. That would mean that as soon as possible she must get a paid job. What on earth were her qualifications?

"We are surprised to hear nothing of an early date of your return," the letter began, "and so, I gather, is Edward. I saw him last week at Boxmouth, where he is staying with Algernon Cassilis, and picking up every day. Dr. Cassilis tells me that this time there is every reason to hope that his recovery is complete, and permanent. In any case I understand that you need not fear any return of the unpleasant occurrences of last autumn. This, of course, completely alters financial arrangements. . . ."

For a moment or two she saw nothing at all, the letter was only a shaking blur. She sat down on Maurice's chair, and for a long time stared wide-

eyed at the wall in front of her, then she rose slowly and stiffly to her feet like a very old woman.

"It isn't true. But, of *course,* it can't be true. . . . There's some mistake somewhere . . . some mistake somewhere."

The last words kept repeating themselves over and over to an idiotic little tune that ran in her head. She went to her writing-case and took out three unopened letters. They were all from the asylum, speaking in turn of a wonderful improvement, a complete reversion of the doctor's first diagnosis of the trouble as brain disease . . . local and temporary obstruction . . . no likelihood of repetition. . . . Finally a rather stiff epistle saying that as they had been unable to get into direct communication with her, they had applied to Dr. Algernon Cassilis, who had removed his brother with the full approval of the asylum doctor.

Rachel crumpled the letters up and thrust them back into her case. A mad impulse seized her to pretend they had never reached her; to go on as if they had never come. . . . She laughed. It was funny when you came to think of it, or at least she supposed it was funny, or why was she laughing? She wished she could stop, but the silent rattling gasping went on just the same. She had asked for

some way out of her present difficulties, and this was the answer. She was to go back to Edward. Back to the old life of incessant watching, of hideous daily and nightly terror. "Recovery?" There could be no such thing. He was born with a warp; he had never been quite sane. Bit by bit she had pieced together fragments of old stories—of how he had nearly killed a boy at school in a fit of fury for which there seemed no cause; how he had more than once been found torturing animals in ways too horrible to name. Then, too, what of his father, who had died of an odd sort of shooting accident? And of an aunt who had fallen in front of a train? How careful Algy was of himself, avoiding all excitement and overwork. Why had he never married? There was a woman he had loved for years, who certainly cared for him. And yet, Rachel knew only too well, Algy would be as urgent as any of them that she should go back to Edward, but then Edward was Algy's obsession. Like her own family he had refused to see that that last night of all when Edward had crept into her room with an open razor in his hand it was her life he had meant to take, not his own. His hatred of her had latterly been his most persistent obsession, though he hid it, except when they were alone, with a cleverness that some-

times frightened her more than his violence. It had deceived Algy as it was meant to do, and had blunted his belief in her veracity when she had told him of other things. She was imagining it, she was overwrought, and perhaps a little hysterical. Edward wasn't *mad*. Oh dear, no, she mustn't think dreadful things like that. Besides he was devoted to her. No, there would be no help to be got from Algy, given the least excuse, and doctor as he was he would go back to his old illusions, simply because he couldn't bear to think anything else.

Her family? Rachel laughed again. What a relief it would be when they could say to inquiring and inquisitive friends that the Cassilis were in Scotland and they hoped would spend a few days with them on their way south. Dear Edward was quite strong again, and Rachel so happy to be with him. Yes; war strain, you know, and then his lungs never were very strong, like so many clever men. And so forth, till Edward, biding his time, would have another "nervous breakdown" and there would be a last and final "unpleasant occurrence."

She found it possible to wish it might come soon.

A sense of her own utter weakness and helplessness overcame her. Her arms lay limp on the table

before her, and her head dropped forward on to them.

The door opened quietly and Maurice was in the room almost before she heard him. She sat up hastily, pretending to write.

"Why did you come in so soon?" she asked without looking up. "You might have stayed out another half-hour."

Maurice walked round the table and stood opposite to her.

"Old Whittaker was tired, and . . . well I did," he concluded.

Rachel got up and went to a side table. She began to turn over a heap of books, looking at the titles.

"I'll read till dinner-time," she said.

Maurice came up behind her, and putting his hands on her shoulders, turned her round.

"You forget I can see," he said dryly; and then in another tone: "Rachel, what is it? It's no use trying to keep up this pretence any longer. . . . It only makes it worse for both of us. We'd better have it out."

Rachel turned her head away and shut her eyes.

"I must go," she whispered.

Maurice's hands dropped by his sides. He

turned away with a groan and walked over to the window.

For a long time he stood there with his back to the room. The short twilight was fast fading, leaving the sky faintly powdered with the coming stars. Down in the garden the palm trees swayed like giant hearse plumes. Out in the corridor Maria was stumping about, carrying hot water to the different bedrooms, to the accompaniment of strident song. The little travelling clock on the monumental card table struck half-past six.

So Rachel was going to leave him. He had known it must come ever since the afternoon on the sandhills, and in the long nights that followed he had tossed about, trying one solution after another by which he might at any price keep her. He felt it would have been a perfectly justifiable and simple thing to find out where Edward was and go and shoot him, as he would have shot a mad dog he found anywhere in her vicinity, but it would hardly have mended matters as far as he and she were concerned. Neither was there any question of a divorce, as far as he could find out. He had discussed the hypothetical case of a friend in a similar difficulty with Mr. Whittaker, who in the course of a varied career seemed to have picked up information

about most things. He seemed quite positive that insanity was not a basis for divorce. Nor, he thought, could an insane person bring an action against his wife should she (for the sake of argument) consent to unite her life to that of another man. It was a very hard case in some instances, Mr. Whittaker remarked. Maurice's comments lasted the greater part of the way home.

What remained?

Rachel of all women, hidden away at Greyladies like a chorus girl? Or wandering about the Continent, exposed to the impertinent advances of *déclassée* women, or, what was almost as bad, that touch of floridness that crept into most men's manners when they suspected a loose screw? Maurice squirmed.

"Will you be dressin' for dinner to-night, sir?"

Brewster appeared at the door with an expression of meek exasperation. Rachel was still standing where Maurice had left her, her eyes fixed sombrely on him.

"Been havin' a few words," Brewster reflected gloomily, as he followed Maurice into his room. He was fed up, he told himself; he had had a very trying week with the Capt'n, and wasn't going to put up with it forever, not if he couldn't give satis-

faction whatever he did—which was Mrs. Cassilis' fault, not his, upsettin' him. Whatever Mrs. Reval was thinking of to engage a young person like that, as was bound to give trouble, it beat him.

He imparted something of this to Mrs. Philbeach, as he polished a patent leather shoe in the passage. She had fallen into the habit of having bright little chats with him whenever she could catch him. "It was so lonely for the poor man, unable to speak a word of the language."

It was not surprising therefore, that by the time they reached the dining-room that evening, all the English contingent were pretty well aware that Captain Bannister and Mrs. Cassilis had had a row, and turned curious eyes on Rachel's white face. It was noticed that for once she and her companion hardly exchanged a word. Only little Mr. Whittaker looked troubled.

When they left the dining-room Maurice made straight for him, but having taken a chair beside him, he relapsed into silence. Rachel drifted into the hall and began to study the various shipping company's announcements. There would be a boat in a day or two for Liverpool. She had better ring up the agents to-morrow and ask about a berth. Anyhow there was a'ways the train. . . . No, not

that if she could go any other way, not an inverted repetition of their journey out.

As she turned away from the notice board, she saw Maurice coming towards her. He took hold of her arm as he had done when he was blind, but now it was he who guided her. At the door of the sitting-room she tried to hold back as if she would have left him, but he drew her inside and closed the door.

"Rachel," he said hoarsely, "what is it to be?"

He had her in his arms now, his hungry lips on hers.

"I can't let you go, and you can't leave me," he whispered. "Why are we making ourselves miserable?"

"I must, I must," moaned Rachel.

For a long time they clung together like two unhappy children, and then Rachel tried gently to release herself.

"We'll think better in the morning," she said. "To-morrow we may see some way."

The bravery of her tone half convinced him, and at length he let her go.

Chapter XV

RACHEL spent most of the night packing. After this she must go—go at once, she kept repeating to herself.

Over there in that other room, only a few yards away, Maurice sleepless and miserable, was walking up and down, up and down. In the stillness all around, she could faintly hear his regular tramp up to the window and back again to the door, as she had heard it often enough these last nights. Once, when she went to her own window and looked out, she saw a burning cigarette-end glow for a second in the darkness, as it fell on the garden path. She drew back quickly, shaking from head to foot. She mustn't listen to him. She mustn't even think of him, or this agonizing longing to go and comfort him and get comfort for herself, would get the better of her. She shut the window sharply, and turned feverishly to her packing.

When that was done she wrote out telegrams to her uncle and her brother-in-law. No need for

letters as she was coming back, besides what could she say? She debated for some time whether or not to write to Mrs. Reval, and finally decided that it would be best to let Maurice tell her as much as he thought fit. The less she told anyone belonging to him, the less chance there was of him finding out that she had gone back to Edward. That at least she could spare him.

Then when all was done that could be done, she fell on her bed, and slept a dreamless exhausted sleep till morning.

She woke with her brain almost unnaturally clear, feeling for the time being seemed dead, everything concentrated on the one point of getting through what she had to do without making a mistake.

On the way back from the post office she met Mr. Whittaker, who turned back to the hotel with her. She was obliged to go home suddenly, she told him. Would he . . . might she ask him to be as much with . . . she bit her lip.

"Captain Bannister? Of course," he would be delighted . . . anything he could do. He hoped it was not bad news.

"Yes," said Rachel, "*very* bad news."

Mr. Whittaker murmured something about being very sorry indeed, and they walked on in silence.

Just as they reached the hotel, Rachel stopped and faced him.

"I'm going by the 7.15 this evening." She swallowed something, and then continued. "He . . . I don't want to plague him with good-byes. . . . Will you go up to him, when you know I'm gone?"

Mr. Whittaker was studying a little pebble which he was prodding with his stick. He did not look up.

"Yes," he assented, "I'll do that."

"Thank you. . . ." She half hesitated and then turned away into the garden.

In the hall of the hotel the porter was waiting for her, with the registration ticket of her luggage which had gone up by an early train. She hoped it had disappeared before anyone was about, but even if Brewster had seen it, he would not be likely to mention it to his master, who had been unapproachable these last days.

She found Maurice wandering listlessly about the sitting-room. He came quickly towards her and taking both her hands in his, kissed first one and then the other, on the backs and then on the palms.

"I couldn't think where you were," he said, with a sigh of relief.

For a moment her steadiness was shaken, but she controlled herself sufficiently to ask:

"Shall we go out?"

"Yes, for the whole day—we'll take lunch and tea. I couldn't stand those blighters down-stairs. . . . Oh Rachel, Rachel . . ."

She could feel his eyes searching her face, and kept her own fixed on his coat collar from which she was removing imaginary specks of dust as she talked rather breathlessly.

"We'll go to that hill I told you about, you'll be able to see the view now, won't you? I'll go and put on my hat, and you can tell Brewster about the carriage and the lunch."

She had made a rapid calculation. It would mean getting back about half-past six. That would be time enough, and it would be immeasurably easier than a day in the hotel, with the danger of someone saying something about her luggage or her room.

These last hours at least were hers; let them be such as neither of them would ever forget. For this day they would live as it might have been given to them to live always, and perhaps some little of the glamour of it might linger through the desolation that must follow.

Never before had she been so entrancing; at one

moment teasing and the next tender, till Maurice, bewildered and bewitched, hid his face against her knee, lest even through his mask, she should read the madness in his eyes.

The shadows of the pine trees lay in bars about them and through the slim trunks the sea shimmered and danced, away beyond the stretches of heather and bog myrtle, where the sun drank the heavy honey-scented sweetness from the cistus bushes. Across the shining water a black ship crept slowly northwards. Rachel looked at it and looked away, but Maurice did not see it. He was intent on plaiting the fringe of a scarf she was wearing into little pig-tails and tying them up with grass, and a hundred other childish plays. He was so happy he hardly knew what he did. Gone were the doubts and hesitations of yesterday; what did he and Rachel care for those scarecrows of old prejudice, the Church and the Law? Public opinion had left them behind ages ago, and sooner or later they would be forced to catch it up. The law would be altered. It was inconceivable that a civilized country could continue to consent to such a state of things. In the meantime he would carry her off to a tent in the desert, where they would never see the face of a white man or woman, or they would

go to one of those islands that you have more or less to yourself—he had heard of something of the sort in the South Pacific—and stop there until things straightened out. She was all his, he was sure of it. What else mattered?

But as they drove home through the gathering dusk, hand clasped in hand under the rug, a vague discomfort, that was more uncertainty than fear, crept over him. A silence had fallen on them—the silence of sheer happiness, he told himself. A chill mist was drifting in from the sea, which might later turn to rain, but by then they would be safe indoors. . . .

When the sitting-room was reached, Rachel saw with a cold clutch at her heart that it was a quarter to seven.

"Maurice," she said quickly, "would it, just for a minute, hurt you to take off your mask?"

Without waiting for an answer she lit two candles and turned out the electric light. When she turned to look at him he had unbuckled the strap at the back of his head, and she saw him for the first time with his face uncovered. For a moment it seemed like a new person, not Maurice at all. She held away, a little shy and surprised . . . she had no idea he was so beautiful, and yet it was her own

Maurice when he smiled. She ran to him with a little cry, and drawing down his head kissed him passionately on his eyes and on his lips. Maurice heard her say something under her breath. Her vehemence frightened him.

"It's going to be all right, sweetheart," he whispered.

"Yes, yes," she answered in the same tone. "Some day it will be all right."

As the clock struck seven she released him, smiling bravely.

"Go and dress for dinner, darling, or we shall be late."

"You won't be long?" he asked uncertainly.

"No, no, not long," she smiled, kissing her fingers to him.

Maurice half reassured, went to his own room.

She listened till she heard him shut the door. Then she stooped and kissed the cushion against which his head had rested, his cigarette-case, and the gloves he had left on the table. As she did so she noticed that she had forgotten her work-bag. Never mind, it might stay. With another frightened look at the clock, she pulled her veil over her streaming eyes, and went downstairs.

In the deserted hall there was no one but Mr. Whittaker. She could only give him her hand. He got very red.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Cassilis, you're a brave woman, if you'll allow me to say so."

Rachel shook her head, and ran down the steps to the road that led to the station.

For a little while after she had passed out of sight, Mr. Whittaker stood looking after her.

"Poor soul, poor soul," he said to himself, as he heard a train rumble away in the darkness. He left the door and walked irresolutely towards the staircase. Bannister must have found out by now, he reflected. He halted and looked up into the empty bareness of the landing above. Better leave him to himself for a bit.

He turned away and went into the dining-room instead. Most of the other people seemed to have come down. For a course or two he made a pretence of eating, all the time haunted by the thought of the man upstairs, and the weeping woman in the train. It was no use, he wasn't hungry. He pushed back his plate and rose to go. As he passed her table, Mrs. Philbeach stopped him.

"Tell me, Mr. Whittaker. As you're such a favoured friend you must know all about it. Is it

really true that Captain Bannister has dismissed Mrs. Cassilis?"

"No," said Mr. Whittaker shortly. "Mrs. Cassilis has been obliged to return home on account of some trouble in her own family. She asked me to say good-bye to you all for her."

Mrs. Philbeach nodded sagaciously.

"Hum, I daresay that's what she'd say. But you know Brewster, Captain Bannister's valet, such a good fellow, so devoted to his master; he says she's been very unsatisfactory lately. Of course one couldn't help seeing she got on Captain Bannister's nerves. I always say it doesn't do to let servants talk——"

"I quite agree with you," interposed Mr. Whittaker, and left her.

"It was just as I thought," he had the comfort of hearing her inform Mrs. Pringle.

He made his way slowly upstairs and knocked at the sitting-room door. There was no reply, and after a momentary hesitation he went in.

Maurice was sitting in his usual place, his head bent forward and his hands hanging limply over his knees. In one of them he held a gay little crimson silk work-bag. As the door opened he hastily stuffed it into his coat pocket.

"I've come to have a smoke with you, if I may," his visitor announced.

He took a cigar from the box that was pushed towards him and lit it. Maurice had resumed his mask. Every now and then his mouth drew into a thin line, and he shivered as if he were cold.

"Raining, isn't it?" he asked, after a long silence.

"Er, yes, I think it is. It was beginning when I was at the door just before dinner. But of course that doesn't mean that it will necessarily be wet to-morrow. The glass is very high."

Another silence. Mr. Whittaker felt a miserable failure.

"You dined up here?" he hazarded.

"Yes, that is. . . . I didn't dine. Got a beastly head. . . . Didn't want anything."

"It's this queer weather," Mr. Whittaker agreed. "I'm a bit out of sorts myself. Later on I'll ask you to give me a whisky and soda."

"Of course, anything you like."

Another pause.

"Queer business this in Ireland," began Mr. Whittaker in despair. "Very queer," agreed Maurice politely.

At ten o'clock Brewster, looking rather fright-

ened, brought in a tray with whisky and soda and a plate of sandwiches. Forgetting that Maurice could see, he winked confidentially at Mr. Whittaker, and pointed to the food.

"I shan't want you again to-night," Maurice told him.

"You won't be wanting anything more to-night, sir?"

"No," said Maurice sharply. "I told you so."

Brewster departed with another significant grimace at Mr. Whittaker.

Maurice drank the whisky thirstily, but shook his head at the sandwiches as if he hated the sight of them.

"You ought to eat something with that head."

"No thanks."

"I'm afraid you've thought me an awful bore coming like this."

A sound conveying something in the nature of a polite negative.

"The truth is she asked me to . . ." Mr. Whittaker felt very brave.

Maurice's head had been turned away, but at this he looked round sharply.

"Thanks very much. Mrs. Cassilis," he pronounced the name very carefully and distinctly,

"probably told you that she was obliged to leave rather suddenly?"

Mr. Whittaker seemed to be measuring the quantity of liquid remaining in his glass.

"Bad news from home, I understood."

"Quite so."

Maurice had risen to his feet. Mr. Whittaker hastily finished his whisky and stood up also.

"Well, I hope your head will be better in the morning," he said with a disastrous assumption of heartiness. "You'll be glad to turn in. . . . Care for a walk to-morrow?"

The other winced.

"I'll let you know. . . . Thanks for coming."

Mr. Whittaker opened the door, but before he had quite closed it behind him, he saw Maurice's hand go to his pocket, from which the red ribbon of the little bag still dangled.

Chapter XVI

THE left-hand window of the railway carriage presented a view of self-conscious looking pink houses, with a white substance oozing from the seams, which showed an increasing tendency to arrange themselves in rows, ending sooner or later in a wilderness of dock-leaves, broken bricks, empty tin cans, and sign-boards informing pioneers that the land might be acquired for building purposes.

On the other side of the line the scene was much the same as it had been for the last half-hour—a dreary waste of chocolate mud, merging into something darker and greyer in the distance, presumably the sea in full retreat. Even here, however, the hand of man was becoming evident. A broad strip of asphalt suddenly emerged from beneath the loose sand and pale, wiry grass, as if it had been running underground all the way from Fiddler's Sands. At intervals it was broken by all too obviously necessary shelters and in one place by a bandstand, from which most of the paint had scaled and fallen.

This must be Boxmouth, Rachel thought, and huddled her cloak closer round her.

The rain descended in an off-and-on fashion, interfered with by an ill-tempered wind, which, with occasional bursts of increased vindictiveness, shook the carriage windows, and tore at the hats and skirts of half a dozen yellow-cheeked blue-nosed health seekers, who straggled about the esplanade.

It was coming closer and closer, the moment when she would see Edward again. She was surprised to find that she felt so little moved by the thought. She was not even afraid. Since she had left Monte Felis her mind had been a complete blank, she was too tired to remember even how she had come here. Some mechanical part of her brain must have functioned sufficiently to get her through the various processes of ticket taking and bill paying. It was like being passively conveyed by somebody else while she herself stood by and did as she was told.

The last four months seemed to belong to a golden improbable past, an enchanted world into which she had strayed between sleeping and waking. And now like the traditional goose-girl, like Cinderella among next morning's ashes, like Tannhäuser at the respectable Court of the Landgrave, she was back once more in a world of harsh words and hard

knocks, with only a little brown spot on her coat to show she had ever been anywhere else.

She stared at the mark with a kind of incredulity, then stroked it gently with her finger and folded a pleat over it. Maurice had let a match fall on it one day, ever so long ago, on that other shore, with its red-gold sands, and its dancing, blue-green sea.

She roused herself with a jerk and looked out of the window again. The railway seemed to run all round the little town, before it came to rest somewhere in a hinterland of small lodging-houses.

What was going to happen next? What did it matter? She had no energy to fight; let them do what they liked. If only it would be over quickly, and she could just go to sleep and not wake again.

As the train began to slow down, she got up and collected her possessions.

Perhaps Algy would have come to meet her, not . . . But no, it was her aunt standing there by a luggage truck. So the Morlands had come, too, to see she gave no trouble.

"Isn't this *too* lovely?" began Mrs. Morland almost before she was within earshot. "Edward is *so* well. We saw him this morning. They're in a furnished house, you know. Oh dear, I hope

that isn't tar on my dress, it must have been off the wheel of that truck, and I didn't notice it; perhaps a little petrol will do it. How happy all this is. And where is your luggage? Mind the truck, or you may get some of it. Here is a porter. We have a cab waiting, I told the man not to go away, so as to make sure. Sometimes there is quite a rush by this train, though of course it isn't the season yet. We shouldn't like it if it was. It's so much quieter now with no dreadful trippers about. Uncle John has gone for a little walk—you know he always likes a little walk in the afternoon—but he will be in for tea."

In the course of what seemed like an interminable drive, entombed in an evil-smelling landau, Rachel learnt that her aunt and uncle had taken rooms in the same hotel as herself. The servants had had no rest since the wedding. It always suited Uncle John to have a little change in the spring. They never went away at Easter as some people did; because poor Mr. Martin would miss their contribution to the offertory, but on the Wednesday after that—that was to say, the day before yesterday—they had left Crampton in the car. Such a good run, leaving Morley Edge at ten and getting here just in time for a late tea. Not a single puncture,

but of course that was because Mason was such a good driver. Yes, Mason was here, and Jackson, too. They would be so pleased to see Rachel. The kitchens had had to be painted, and two of the servants' bedrooms repapered where that tiresome pipe had burst in the frost. The spare room really ought to be done, but that would have to wait. The kitchens really couldn't be left any longer. Mrs. Morland was ashamed of the charwoman seeing them, but it had all made a dreadful upset.

Here they were, this was the hotel. Of course they had their own sitting-room. Uncle John wouldn't like to sit in the public ones, people came and spoke to you if you did. It was really very comfortable and very clean. The manager was very obliging of course, they were always keen enough to get their sort of clients. Rachel must, of course, use the sitting-room, too. Here it was, the third door on the left.

Rachel looked vaguely at the photogravures of "Wedded" and "The Soul's Awakening," which with smaller expressions of the art of Miss Maud Goodman, assisted to cover up the patches of damp on the salmon-pink wallpaper. An ample English tea was spread on the table, and a bright fire sent at least twice as much smoke up the chimney as it did

into the room. Why then at this moment should the memory of that other room come so blindingly before her. The bare grey walls, the dull brown linoleum on the floor, the grass-green tablecloth, with the yellow flannel sunflowers. . . . Through the window the dingy sea could be seen, reluctantly returning to Boxmouth.

"Such a nice view, isn't it?" remarked Mrs. Morland, in a proprietary tone. "On clear days you can see part of a wreck there was last winter. Come and have tea now, because I know you'll want to be running off to Edward. He's *so* well, as I said before; and seemed quite to enjoy a chat with Uncle John. He's got a little stout, you know. I expect he's not been taking much exercise. I believe it's part of a rest cure to keep you lying down a good deal. Here's Mrs. Cassilis, Jackson" —as a respectable elderly maid came into the room —"isn't she looking well? I'm sure Mr. Cassilis will think we've taken good care of her."

The maid tendered a respectful opinion that Mrs. Cassilis was "fuller in the face" and asked for her keys. What dress would she be wearing for dinner? The black. Her aunt applauded the decision. It was much better style to dress quietly in hotels.

Prattle of the Greenwoods and the Willsons filled

the next half-hour. The children of the former had had the measles, and Enid, well, Mrs. Morland supposed there was no harm in telling Rachel, only she must be sure not to talk about it to anybody else, because it was early days yet. Jackson, of course, knew, but then she'd been with them so long. . . .

Mrs. Morland's delighted asterisks died on her lips as her husband came in.

"Well," she resumed heartily, "so you've had your little walk. Rachel, ring the bell, and the waiter will bring fresh tea for Uncle John. We had ours early because of your journey."

Mr. Morland surveyed his niece without enthusiasm.

"I've just met Algernon Cassilis," he grunted, as he submitted to her perfunctory kiss. "He says they're coming round here presently."

"I hope you asked them to dinner. We could have one of those larger tables by the window," interposed his wife. "Dear me, I feel just as if it were one of the girls getting engaged again."

"Wouldn't come." Mr. Morland cut her short. "Says Edward needs all the sleep he can get."

No excitement, thought Rachel. Algy, then, didn't seem so very sure.

Mrs. Morland babbled on of what they had done when they had stayed in hotels when the girls had been engaged. Rachel wondered where she had seen it and heard it all before. Or perhaps it was a Grand Guignol she remembered, in which a man was slowly strangled while a hurdy-gurdy rattled out sentimental ballads in the street below.

Not till she was alone in her own room did it strike her that neither her aunt nor her uncle had asked her a single question about her own doings. Perhaps they meant to ignore the fact that she had ever been away.

Someone knocked at the door.

"Entra," said Rachel, from long habit.

A wooden-faced chambermaid put her head in.

"Two gentlemen to see you, madam, they're in the settin'-room."

Rachel went deadly cold all over; it had come then. She began to tremble violently.

"Tell them I'm coming," she managed to say.

She made a long business of brushing her hair and washing her face, further drawn out by her shaking hands which dropped everything she took up. At last it could be spun out no longer. If she didn't go now, she would never be able to go of her own accord.

She opened the door and stumbled blindly down the corridor.

Algernon was standing before the fire warming his hands. Edward was over by the window playing with the blind tassel. He was, as Mrs. Morland had said, much stouter. . . . Almost bloated. His features had grown gross, but his restless expressionless eyes were just the same.

He came forward briskly.

"My dear girl, we'd almost given you up. Didn't they tell you I was here?"

She shut her eyes as he came nearer and implanted a kiss on her cheek that seemed to sting.

"What sort of a journey did you have?" asked her brother-in-law. He made a sign to her to say something to Edward, who had returned to his blind tassle.

"Have you been playing golf?" she stammered. She noticed that her nervousness seemed to affect Dr. Cassilis.

"Oh yes, I play golf," replied Edward, "I'm perfectly safe with a club, if that's what you mean," he added with a grin.

"But I say, you know," he went on before she could speak, "it's all very well, but I can't hang about this infernal little place for ever even to amuse

you, my dear girl. You've kept me hanging about here long enough. I've written to the Lord Chancellor that I must see him on Tuesday. If he doesn't see me then, he'll be sorry for it. These fellows, none of them understand my real position. Why I could break any of them in an hour. They don't know who they're up against."

He laughed discordantly.

Rachel had heard the same sort of boasting so often before, that she was not much impressed, but Dr. Cassilis looked worried.

"Come and sit down, Edward," he said persuasively. "Rachel has told us nothing about what she has been doing."

Rachel wondered if he noticed the look Edward gave her as he took his place by her on the sofa. She had faced it many times before, there was only one way—to show him that she wasn't in the least afraid; to beat down his will with hers, till his eyes would begin to shift about, and he would be forced to look away. But now, to her horror she found that all the power had gone out of her. It required all the self-control she possessed to sit where she was, and not cry out.

"These people you were with, I understand the name was Bannister. Were they any relation to

the old General?" Dr. Cassilis was asking conversationally.

"Yes," she managed to reply.

"His brother, I suppose?"

"No."

She wondered what he thought of her parrot-like answers, and suddenly flaming face.

"There was a daughter, I remember, a very beautiful woman. I saw her once at the house of a patient, and I think I heard there were two sons." Talk for the sake of talk—anything would do.

Rachel heard a voice, presumably her own, announcing:

"It was the younger son I was with. He had temporarily lost his sight. They wanted someone to read to him and write his letters. His sister couldn't go herself. We used to go for drives, or else I read to him in the woods, on the sands. . . ."

She stopped herself at last. What on earth was she saying?

Edward had been silent, but now he broke in with his strident, jarring laugh. He went on laughing and laughing, putting his face close to hers as she shrank back from him.

Dr. Cassilis got up and put a hand on his arm.

"Come," he said sharply. "We'll come back and see Rachel to-morrow. She's tired now."

Unfortunately at this moment Mrs. Morland chose to appear. Her face was flushed and her voice, when she spoke, shrilled with cheerfulness.

"Have you had a nice talk?" she inquired brightly.

"Delightful," Edward assured her. "Rachel's been giving us the most valuable evidence. She won't be able to shut me up again in a hurry, or if she tries it, we shall have the case for the plaintiff clear enough."

His grating laughter began again. Mrs. Morland looked rather scared, but she decided that whatever the joke it was better to join in it.

"Well, I must say you all seem very merry," she laughed. "It's nice to see Edward in such spirits, isn't it?"

Rachel was paralysed, and even Dr. Cassilis seemed to have lost his presence of mind.

"Come, come," he said at last to Edward, "we must be going."

He took his brother's arm, almost pulling him towards the door.

"You can't shut me up again," giggled Edward, shaking his finger at Rachel. "You and I are going to have some more talk about this."

The door closed behind him, but all down the passage they could hear his dreadful laughter. Mrs. Morland looked uncertainly at her niece.

"I'm afraid seeing you again has just a tiny wee bit over-excited him. You must remember that he isn't very strong yet."

"He's mad," retorted Rachel, hiding her face in her hands. "As mad as he has ever been. Why on earth do you all try to keep up this pretence?"

Mrs. Morland looked as if Rachel had slapped her.

"My dear!" She controlled herself with an effort, and went on in a tone that hovered between indignation and reproof. "When you talk like that of your own husband I hardly know what to say. If it was one of the girls I don't know what I should do. I expect you're over-tired with your journey, so we won't talk any more about it now. Run and change quickly, because you know, Uncle John doesn't like us to be late."

But it was not till towards the end of dinner that Rachel became aware that her aunt was furtively looking at her, not with the air of complacent depreciation which she reserved especially for members of her husband's family, and to which her niece was well accustomed, but more as she might have eyed a Bolshevik had one been pointed out to

her among the diners at the other tables. She realized that this had been so ever since Mrs. Morland had interrupted the scene with Edward, and that even then her cheerfulness had been more artificial than ever. It all portended something unpleasant, but they made no difficulty about her going to bed when dinner was over. Her uncle had been very much as usual.

"What are you going to do?" Mrs. Morland burst out as soon as she was alone with her husband. Without waiting for an answer she had tip-toed heavily to the door into her bedroom and finding nobody in the inner room, had closed it securely.

"Do about what?" asked her husband without looking up from the share list.

"What I told you before dinner. That man. . . . I heard her most distinctly tell Algernon Cassilis. . . . I couldn't help it because the door was open. . . ."

She seated herself on the opposite side of the fire and took a small piece of white knitting from her bag.

"Oh dear, oh dear, if things weren't difficult enough as it was," she sighed, and shook her head, frowning.

"There's nothing to be done. It's Edward's af-

fair now. I don't know what you're worrying about," mumbled Mr. Morland without removing his pipe.

"Oh well, of course if you look at it like that," she replied in a flustered treble. "But I never *have* been comfortable about Rachel. Of course it probably *isn't* anything or she wouldn't have told Dr. Cassilis like that, but you remember how fascinated her mother used to get with clergymen and doctors. And now if you'd heard the way Edward spoke to her, I'm sure I hope he doesn't mean to do anything."

Mr. Morland put down his paper.

"What can he do?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I can't help feeling dreadfully worried on the girls' account. It would be so awful for them if he did anything."

"Did *what?* I wish to God you'd say what you mean."

"Well, I mean did anything that got into the papers—a law case of any kind. . . ." She was pink all over, nose and forehead, with distress.

Mr. Morland hunched about in his chair; he did not care to let her see that she was disturbing him.

"Oh rubbish. Whatever's put that into your head? I don't know why you couldn't find out what

she was doing, but it's no use crying over spilt milk. Edward'll know how to put sense into her. There's nothing wrong with him now, and he's glad enough to get her back. As for that cock-and-bull story of what happened last autumn, Cassilis' own opinion is that feeling his self-control going and fearing that he might succumb to the temptation to take his own life, he went to her for help, and she like a fool, instead of trying to quiet him, screamed and fainted. Cassilis swears he's devoted to her."

Mrs. Morland's face puckered up.

"All the same I wish we hadn't come here. You see there might be something. . . . I wish you'd heard him. He was talking about evidence and plaintiffs just as if he meant to. . . ."

Her voice broke, and she began to hunt for her handkerchief. "I know you think me silly, but I always think of the children. And it would be so awful for them—their own cousin, and us too in it; if we're here, we should be dragged right in. And Enid . . . the doctor thinks it will be the end of December. . . ."

Sob, sob, sob.

"Here, come now, Minna . . . for God's sake stop that nonsense." He rose from his chair, and shook down one trouser leg and then the other.

"We'll go to-morrow—after lunch if you like. You wanted to go to Brighton. It's not more than a couple of hours' run. I'll wire for rooms at the 'Suburban'; they say the food is all right. Only mind you'll have to be all packed by midday and the luggage go on by train with Jackson."

When Mrs. Morland had dried her eyes and blown her nose, something of her usual placidity returned.

"Yes, dear, certainly. If that's what you'd like. I'm sure it's better for us to leave them alone a little. More considerate you know, and then if everything's all right they can come and stay with us a little later on."

After all, it wasn't as if Rachel was her *own* niece, she said to herself as she put away her knitting. But she did not explain even to herself what she meant by it.

Chapter XVII

THE rain which had continued intermittently through the night, was still holding its own against the wind as Rachel made her way towards the shore next morning. Whatever the weather was like it was preferable to be out of doors rather than to remain in the sitting-room, a prey to the remorseless scratching of her aunt's pen.

Thoughtless visitors have often remarked that it is a pity that Boxmouth is so completely severed from its beach by the railway, ignoring the fact that at least two contractors on the Town Council have been made rich and happy by the arrangement, one supplying the wrought-iron painted bridges which, at frequent intervals, leap high over lines and alight on the promenade, while his colleague has burrowed noisome white-tiled tunnels for the benefit of the unathletic.

Rachel paused before one of the latter. It was plainly ticketed "Way to the Shore"—a destination signalled to the nose of the pedestrian some yards before the notice became legible. In spite of

the wind she chose a bridge. She struggled up the steps, her skirt wrapping itself like a winding-sheet about her knees, while with one hand she clutched her hat, and with the other endeavoured to retain possession of a book and an umbrella.

At the top she paused, out of breath, and looked down the flat coast-line. To the south-east the sun had put an eye to a keyhole in the clouds, touching a patch of green weed into vivid emerald. She looked at it with a feeling of gratitude. Like most nervously constituted people she was intensely sensitive to weather; if only the sun would come out she knew she would be so much braver. But just then another cloud broke overhead in a battering scurry of rain, which sent her hurrying down the other flight of steps to the nearest shelter.

She chose a side where she could still see the green weed, and opened her book. A sheet of paper fell out of it and fluttered to the ground. Mechanically she stooped and picked it up. There was something written on it in a writing that was unfamiliar to her.

"My dear Patch. . . ."

Maurice's writing. She had looked at it, and had not known it. It must have been an attempt to write in the frame someone had sent him. A bad

attempt; in one place he had begun one line on top of the former one. Then came a sentence with some words left out.

Up till now it seemed as if she had only thought of her own need of him, but the little scribbled bit of paper, the mistakes, the helplessness of it, woke all the mother-hunger, all the mother-fearfulness in her heart. How was it with him? In what state had she left him? What harm might the shock of finding she had gone have done him? Suppose he became blind again, alone in that unfriendly hotel, with only Brewster? Why, oh *why* hadn't she taken Mr. Whittaker into her confidence—at least to the extent of giving him an address which would find her if. . . . If what? Suppose she knew that Maurice was ill, was blind again, what could she do? Go back to him? Drag him into a scandal that would leave her a hopeless impediment between him and even his own very tolerant world, and a perpetual source of petty stings and humiliations which would come near to maddening him in time?

She pressed her hands over her eyes. He wasn't ill, he wasn't blind. She couldn't believe it, couldn't endure it. He was strong now. But he would suffer. Only she who knew him as she knew herself, could realize what that suffering would be.

He was no longer the charming, indolent, semi-invalid of earlier days, childishly wayward one moment, and childishly happy the next, but wholly lovable in all moods. It was another Maurice that had waked in those last days; a passionate hot-blooded man, seeing only that which he desired, primitive in his capacity for blind, unreasoning suffering when it was denied him. It had been no ordinary falling in love; such outward attractions as she possessed had been hidden from him till almost the last. In those long weeks they had spent together she had made herself a part of his being, so that they had come to think with one mind, even as they saw with but one pair of eyes, and without her he would go a maimed man for the rest of his days.

Suddenly she asked herself if she had not done it deliberately. Right away from the very beginning, when she had read Corisande Heaven's letter, had she not even then been jealous of this other woman's power to hurt him—so that she had never rested till she had made him her own?

She had known perfectly well when he was beginning to care for her, probably long before he knew it himself, and instead of going away then, she had not only stayed with him, hugging the

knowledge in her heart, but had delayed till the very last to do what she should have done at the beginning, and told him her real position with regard to Edward. Why had she done it? Was it cowardice, a loathing of everything that reminded her of it, the same that had made her leave the letters from the asylum unopened? Whatever it was, the consequences were the same for Maurice.

She had held his life in her hands and she, who had had no thought hard enough for a silly child of eighteen, had only taken it to break it again.

She thought she had reached the limit of her capacity to suffer when she left him, but the next half-hour was to teach her that beside the fires of self-reproach that now consumed her, her former state had been peace indeed. Even the thought of Maurice became intolerable. For the time being every memory was poisoned. What did he feel towards her? Did he not hate her as she deserved he should? She had told him nothing. Left no word of explanation. She had gone out of his life as silently as she had come into it. Perhaps it was the only thing she could have done. At least he was spared the knowledge that she had gone back to Edward.

She crouched against the side of the shelter, her

head in her hands. There was no hope, no comfort anywhere. She dared not look back, and she could not bring herself to look forward.

Footsteps approaching at last made her look up. Through the glass screen behind her she saw her brother-in-law, coming towards her, alone. For a moment she was tempted to stay still and chance his passing without seeing her. But it was too late. She shut the piece of paper in the book, holding it tightly in both hands, and stood up.

"My dear Rachel, you look . . . I'm afraid you are still very tired," he began.

"I am, rather. How is Edward?"

It seemed the most suitable thing to say.

Dr. Cassilis sat down beside her. He had none of his brother's rather florid good looks, his mouth was thin and pinched with a life of perpetual self-refusals, and when, for the time being, his confident professional manner was laid aside, his eyes had a sad, almost puzzled expression, as if asking quarter from a fate that was harsh beyond understanding. Now, however, as they looked at Rachel, they were both affectionate and eager.

"Edward is *much* better, quite himself. He was a little bit excited perhaps at seeing you, but to-day, he's quite all right. A good night . . . ate an ex-

cellent breakfast. It's the first time he's had the least symptom of—er—excitement. But that's easily accounted for. It seems nothing in the world except that of course we mustn't expect too much just at first—or let him be worried at all, or, well you understand."

"I understand that he is much the same as he was twelve months ago. . . . Before that last attack," replied Rachel slowly.

"He's perfectly sane if that's what you mean." There was a sharp note in his voice, which left it as he continued. "Dear old fellow, he talked most touchingly of you last night after dinner. I wish you could have heard him. Said how much he owed you and how splendid you'd always been. He doesn't like the idea of his wife doing anything for her living; no man does. He made it clear it was that—of course, all the rest was only joking. I explained to him your reasons for taking this post—that it was in order that he should be in greater comfort, and he was quite touched. Upon my word he was, there were tears in his eyes."

There was something very like them in Dr. Cassilis' eyes as he spoke. Rachel was silent. How could she hurt poor Algy? What hope was there of making him see what was so patent to her—

that it was all pretence, and that Edward was deceiving everybody except herself?

"I wanted to see you alone to tell you this," continued Algernon, "and also to beg of you to put all those unhappy incidents out of your mind, and . . . and to show Edward all the affection I know you have for him. The poor fellow is so terribly sensitive, and—I'm quite sure you didn't realize it—but your manner to him yesterday might have struck one as a little cold. I couldn't help thinking it hurt him, and that he was trying to carry it off with a little chaff. . . . You'll forgive me for saying this, because you know how fond I am of both of you. No one knows your devotion to Edward better than I do. If I were a woman I should be just as you are, and of course I know that sometimes the very force of one's feelings makes it difficult to express them. But dear old Edward's different, he's so very warm-hearted, he doesn't understand. He needs response, a very great deal of response. Now why don't you leave the hotel, and come and join us?"

Rachel stared fixedly at the sodden sands and the mud-coloured complaining sea. There was a buzzing in her ears, and blur before her eyes, but her voice rang out sharply:

"If you're suggesting that I should go back to Edward and live with him as his nurse, yes. But if you mean as his wife, I can only tell you definitely once and for all that I cannot do it."

Dr. Cassilis shifted his position so that he could see her profile, but she kept her face obstinately turned from him. He had been prepared for hesitations and misgivings but hardly for this passionate refusal. There was something in it that he didn't understand—a repulsion that was not altogether fear. The worried look on his tired face deepened.

"You're assuming a heavier responsibility than you quite realize," he said in a low voice. He hesitated a moment and then added: "You may have some motive that I don't know of, which leads you to avoid my poor brother, but I don't ask for your confidence. You may also have had some reason for delaying your return . . . and for not writing. I don't want to know any of these things. You *have* come back . . . let it stand at that. Now, the future is very largely in your hands. On my word of honour, I believe that as far as Edward's health is concerned, there is no reason whatever why you should not do all in your power to make him happy."

Rachel made an attempt to rise, but he put his hand on her arm.

"Stay at the hotel for a week or two, and see for yourself, but, above all, remember what I have said."

She shook her head.

"It's no use, Algy, I'll stay here as long as you like. I came back to do that. But for the rest —can't you see he hates me? I think I do him harm, I always did, and now he thinks it is I who put him in that place."

"Oh, that's rubbish, as I've explained to you. I'm afraid you've got some fixed idea. . . . Well, it's no use arguing. You'll see for yourself. Only . . . it's not what I'd hoped of you, Rachel."

There was a long uncomfortable silence. Dr. Cassilis was drawing lines with his stick in a little drift of sand near his feet. Rachel sat dumb and miserable, afraid to hurt him more if she went away. Algy was the hardest of them all to fight.

"Edward wants to take you for a drive this afternoon," he said presently in his ordinary tone. "Would a quarter to three be too early for you?"

"You'll come, too?"

"Yes, yes, this time I'll come." He sighed. "I think it's going to clear," he added more hopefully.

Chapter XVIII

WHEN Rachel reached the hotel she went up to the sitting-room. She had had breakfast early and gone out before the Morlands were astir.

The room was empty, but on the table stood a thermos, and beside it two umbrellas and a walking-stick strapped together. On the sofa lay Mrs. Morland's fur coat, a rug, and a foot-muff. Her writing-case, the railway guide, and the small scattered objects, such as photographs of the grandchildren, two packs of cards, and some library novels which had lain about yesterday had all vanished. Was it possible that they were going, and so suddenly? Any displacement usually caused Mrs. Morland three weeks' heavy preparation. They always took rooms from one fixed date to another. Rachel was sure they had spoken of staying at least a fortnight. What on earth was the reason? Thank Heaven though they were going, it didn't matter why.

As she reached this conclusion, her aunt bustled in from the bedroom.

"Oh, is that you, dear? I've never seen you all

the morning so I couldn't tell you of our change of plans. You see Uncle John doesn't think this place suits him, it isn't bracing enough, so we've made up our minds to move on to Brighton. They say the 'Suburban' is very comfortable, *so* clean, not a speck of dust anywhere. Mrs. Willson goes there every spring, and you know what she's like. I can't really say much for this place. We've had to send for the big bath towels from home, Uncle John can't stand these little ones. Mrs. Willson particularly mentioned the bath towels at the 'Suburban.' "

"I believe the country round is very pretty, Rottingdean, and those places," said Rachel, trying to show polite interest.

"I daresay," Mrs. Morland replied vaguely. "But the main thing is that the hotel is really *clean*."

She looked round the room, then touched each of the things on the table in turn, as if to make sure that they were what they seemed to be.

"You and Edward must come to us when we get home," she went on without looking at Rachel. "I've told the servants to expect us on the 27th, that's a Wednesday, so we shall have been away just three weeks. Cousin Fanny comes the week after for ten days, but when she goes, we can have

you. I know the girls want to see Edward again. Let us know, won't you, how you go on."

"Thank you," said Rachel. "With Edward in his present state it's impossible to make plans. . . . As long as Algy can stay with him, I expect we shall be here."

Mrs. Morland as usual shied away from the subject of Edward's health as if it were something indelicate.

"You had better speak to the chambermaid at once about your washing if you want it back before the end of the week," she remarked repressively. "But I don't suppose you'll stay here now we've gone. It would look rather odd."

Rachel was saved the trouble of replying by the advent of Mr. Morland, and they all went down to lunch.

At half-past two punctually the car came round, after two messages had been sent to ask if it was ready. Mason's embittered expression was enough to inform Rachel that he was not only before the time at which he had been ordered, but had not been permitted to complete his lunch. What a fuss they were in. Her aunt was trying to clear her mouth of her motor veil in order to kiss her. Her uncle looked morose and uncomfortable.

"Write to us and be sure to tell us everything," said Mrs. Morland for the fifth time running. "You're going out with Edward this afternoon?" Her face suddenly cleared. "Oh, that's lovely. John, do you hear? Rachel and Edward are going for a nice drive. And if any letters should come for us you'll be sure . . ."

Her voice died on the wind as the car rolled off.

They had hardly gone before Edward and Algy appeared. Edward had changed his mind about a drive and wanted to go for a walk instead. Rachel was surprised to find she could look at him without any particular feeling to-day, her mind seemed empty of everything. She was like a person watching a stupid play which she has seen many times before.

They turned down a road leading to the sandhills beyond which lay the golf links, they would go for a walk like this every afternoon to their lives' ends, along asphalt roads, with drifts of sand in the gutters and smug little red brick villas, each with a tiny garden bordering the sides. Rachel supposed that they would take one of them themselves in time, and she would become one of those ageless, dead-faced women, to be seen round the provision shops in the Main Street, or tramp-

ing the promenade in the wake of a Bath-chair.

The sun, after one or two changes of mind, had come forth with the apparent intention of spending the rest of his allotted hours with them. Soon the little red houses gave place to large ones combining all the features of gentlemen's country seats in about an acre of "grounds." Then quite abruptly they came on the wide spaces of the links, and beyond a grey ribbon of sea.

Edward had made no reference to the day before. He seemed cheerful and reasonable, so that Rachel began to understand better how Dr. Cassilis fed his illusions. At first he was rather silent, only putting in a word here and there, while his brother bore most of the weight of the conversation, but presently he began to talk very amusingly, as he could when he chose. He started by making fun of his brother's methods of playing golf. His wit, as usual, was arrogant and not particularly kind, but Algy was far too happy to care what he said, as long as he was amused, and even Rachel laughed once or twice at his description of poor Algy's combination of ungainliness, short-sight, and desperate earnestness. Presently he passed on to the Morlands.

"For God's sake keep those relations of yours

chained up, Rachel, I never could stand them, and as years go on they don't improve. I wish you'd cut all connection with them. They're not the sort of people we can introduce to our friends. You ought to be able to see it."

"They've gone away this afternoon," said Rachel. "All the same, it's a pity you don't like them, they're very fond of you."

"Oh, well, of course, you can see they're pleased enough with the connection. Lord! They gave me precious little peace until I married you. I've told you that story, haven't I, Algy?"

"Yes, yes," replied his brother. "I think we'd better get on to the road. Those people are waiting to drive."

Edward looked round with a scowl at two men who waited with ill-concealed impatience by two little pinched-up heaps of sand. He stood quite still for a moment, looking from them in the direction of the next hole and back again, then he began to walk away, Algy was on ahead, Rachel preparing to follow. Suddenly Edward wheeled round and shouted:

"To your right, Rachel, quick."

Rachel started from a dream and mechanically ran in the direction he had indicated. There was a

shout, an exclamation from Dr. Cassilis, and something that seemed like a bullet whizzed between her ear and her shoulder and fell with a little thud some yards ahead. Edward turned on her, livid with anger.

"Why weren't you quicker, you fool?" And then, seeing his brother's face of blank astonishment, he mastered himself with an effort: "I told her it was coming on her right," he said quickly.

The man who had driven the ball came running up.

"If you hadn't shouted at her, sir," he began indignantly. "She was all right where she was. What on earth you thought you were doing . . ."

"You damn well mind your own business . . ." roared Edward. "I'll do what I damn well like with my own wife. There's been enough interference. . . ."

The man was beginning an equally heated answer about by-laws and having the whole thing up before the committee, when an odd expression began to dawn on his face. He stared at Edward for a moment, and then, raising his cap to Rachel, walked away. Edward looked as if he had half a mind to pursue him, but instead gave a hunch of his shoulders, and strode off to the sandhills.

Rachel had stood by white-faced and staring.

"You must not mind what he said," whispered Dr. Cassilis hurriedly. "He was frightened out of his life; that man could drive a ball through a brick wall. It might very easily have killed you."

"I know that," said Rachel, with cold, stiff lips.

But when he turned to go after Edward she passively followed him. She knew now for certain that her hour was not far off; that he had failed this time only made it more sure he would try again, and soon. She felt a strange numbness which left her without either power or will to resist. If she could have been herself, have interested and amused him for a time she might have gained to-day. In the old days she had often beguiled him from his furies by turning his mind to his triumphs, real or imaginary, or by inventing complimentary things which she told him she had heard said of him. But now, even if she could have roused herself from this paralysing lethargy, the thought of these harem methods revolted her. It was coming sooner or later. Of what use was her life to her that she should want to prolong it?

Again she felt as if she were at a play which she had seen many times before. She had been mistaken in fancying it went on for a long time,

in reality it would be over quite soon. Her brain had begun to act quite as if it were somebody else's telling her what was going to happen next, and what she was to do. Everything seemed clear and precise to her, so that she stopped and read the label on an empty stout bottle which was sticking end up out of the sand. She remembered having been made to drink stout by a doctor. She used to have it at eleven o'clock every morning with a wafer biscuit. However carefully you poured it, it made a nasty stain on the tray-cloth. A sodden old boot, washed up by the tide? Or left by some tramp and soaked in yesterday's rain? Yesterday was the day she had come here, and to-day was the day her uncle and aunt had gone away. . . . Even that seemed a long time ago. Why had they gone? Something about the washing? She remembered something about the washing; it was a difficult thing to get it back in some hotels . . . and they did it so badly she had had to speak about the way they tore his shirts. Hadn't Brewster said there were two collars short this week? And his handkerchiefs, one had come back in two pieces. It was a shame; he had such beautiful fine things. Surely it was getting chilly; he ought to go in. It was a bad sign when the sea made that moaning sound.

Somebody spoke. *Edward?* How came he. . . . Then she remembered.

"Here, we've had enough of this, let's go home." He had been flinging pebbles against a strip of rock, but now he seemed suddenly to tire of it.

"Right," agreed Dr. Cassilis, "we'll walk back along the shore."

Edward's ill-humour seemed to have vanished. He walked between the other two, talking and laughing about funny things he had heard in the course of his professional career, incredible things which people had done for years and years and never been found out, especially cases when the wife had been the victim of the husband or the reverse. It was all so lightly and rationally told, that Dr. Cassilis laughed frequently, and rather meaninglessly from sheer relief. He noticed that Edward addressed most of what he said in a chaffing kind of way to Rachel, and kept turning his head as if he were smiling at her.

If only she would make an effort and shake off this imbecile dread of him. It was that that was doing all the harm by creating an atmosphere in which every little incident was magnified into something tremendous. He had been sorry for her at first, because he saw how genuine it was, but now

he was losing patience. She was undoing everything he had done. Edward had not shown a sign of temper or excitability till she came. There was nothing for it, he must leave them to themselves more. As long as he was there to appeal to, she would make no effort to exercise her self-control.

But when he tried to drop behind them, there was Rachel looking round at him with that almost idiotic absence of all expression on her face that goes with acute terror. His anger with her grew till she absorbed all his attention. Once or twice he saw her stumble as if her legs refused to bear her. He ceased to pay any heed to Edward, or he might have noticed an odd change in his voice, and that he was talking very persistently, no longer about law cases, but about their aunt who had been killed by a train.

"It was over instantly," he was saying. "There she was, a hale sound woman, tall and well-dressed just as you are, and then . . . all in an instant—rags, blood, bits of hair sticking to the wheels. She'd been wearing one of those little velvet hats, toques, you call them, don't you? They couldn't see it—it was all smashed up with her head. So they buried it altogether. I remember our coach-

man telling us. He'd been on the station and seen it. . . ."

They had reached the first footbridge over the railway. A man had a small newspaper stand at the foot of it, on the esplanade side.

"You two go on to the hotel," Dr. Cassilis said, "I'll catch you up in a minute. I want to get an evening paper." There was a click overhead as a signal fell.

"Right oh," replied Edward cheerfully, taking hold of Rachel's arm. She looked over her shoulder at her brother-in-law, but he was absorbed in the papers. Her voice only rattled in her throat. Edward's fingers were like steel, numbing her arm from elbow to wrist. Maurice had often held her arm, too, just in the same place; it seemed funny. She ceased to see anything distinctly, and yet she didn't quite faint; she knew she mustn't do that. After the first two steps she no longer moved deliberately—her feet went on from step to step of their own volition. There was a noise that grew louder and louder in her ears, perhaps the train which was coming down the line. Edward was laughing, she could hear him through all the other noise.

"And the joke of it was they always thought it

was suicide . . . 'while of unsound mind' and all that tosh."

There was no one else on the bridge, even if she managed to scream the engine would drown her voice. At the top of the steps her knees failed her, but now his arm was round her waist, holding her upright, moving her forward, she had seen people who fainted in church propelled like that. He was pushing her towards the railings. She tried to speak to him, but her throat contracted, her mouth fell open, she tried, but could not shut it. She was against the rails, and he was trying to lift her, but she had thrust her foot as far as it would go between the ironwork. There was only just room, when she turned it sideways it couldn't be pulled back. Her hands were clenched on the hand-rail but he struck them off. The train was very near now. The line seemed to heave up so that it was coming straight in her face. Edward was dragging at her waist, wrenching at her, twisting her, jerking her. Her foot, her foot, she screamed with the pain. She would have drawn it out if she could and made an end, but it was stuck firm. The train was roaring on her now. Footsteps running from both sides of the bridge.

"Maurice, Maurice," she heard somebody call.

Smoke and steam filled her eyes and mouth. The awful tugging at her waist had suddenly ceased as something big and heavy rose above her head, hung for a fraction on the rail, and then went over into the blinding vapour that rose to meet it.

Chapter XIX

BY the morning after Rachel left him, Maurice was down with a sharp attack of fever, which for days kept him hovering on the borders of semi-delirium, alternately trying to get out of bed with the intention of catching the first train for Paris, and, when his strength failed, ordering Brewster to go and find Mrs. Cassilis because he wanted to speak to her.

The first moment he could stand he would follow her to Crampton, or wherever she had gone. He would set an inquiry agent to work, if there was no other way. He didn't care for a whole army of Morlands, he would break into a convent if it came to that. She had run away from him because she could not trust herself. Let him see her again and all would be well. He had been ten thousand times a fool not to rush her off her feet right away; if he had lost her he had only his imbecile hesitations to thank. What on earth would keep them apart? A barbarous law, as insane as the people it was framed to protect.

Then he would get out of bed and begin to wander about the room, trying to remember as well as his swimming head would let him, what it was he had meant to do. To find Rachel, to find Rachel, that was what it was. It always came round to the point when he was forced to sit down on the chair by the dressing-table, and then his head would go down on his arms.

How he was even going to try to live without her?

And yet when the longed-for day of departure came, it seemed that in parting with these tangible associations he lost the last shred of her. So much so that to the bewilderment of Senhor Gonçalves he asked him what he would take for the sitting-room furniture, and then before the former had recovered sufficiently to consider how much he dared ask, said he wouldn't have it at any price. Wouldn't every sight of the beastly things remind him that he was alone?

But on the ship, another mood took him, his thoughts began to turn to India, if he could not find Rachel that at least remained. He had not looked at a paper since she left, but a man he sat next at dinner had said there was more trouble brewing. The doctors would pass him now. If he couldn't

have Rachel, he would clear out of England by the first boat he could get, and never come back again. One day he discovered that he was counting less and less on finding Rachel and what he called getting her to listen to reason. The more he thought about it the more the conviction pressed on him that Rachel was stronger than he had chosen to admit. She had once spoken very hotly about a woman for whom a man had thrown up his career and most other desirable things. He had tried to argue that if two people loved each other nothing else mattered. "But she *didn't* love him. Can't you see that if she had done, she couldn't have let him do it?" she had indignantly persisted, and he had been powerless to shake her. And now if that was how she felt about it. . . . Perhaps if he had still been blind and helpless. . . . She would never have left him, then.

Well, there was no harm in going to see a good lawyer and finding out exactly how they stood. He would do that, and then if there was any reasonable prospect of freeing her, he would go and put the whole thing to her.

On his arrival in London he found that his sister was back at her house in Curzon Street, and in the first glow of her engagement to Lord Charles-

worth. It was a relief to find that she was far too preoccupied to question him about his doings or to ask what had become of his secretary.

"Darling, how lovely it is to see you again, and not a bit disfigured," she exclaimed when he walked into her sitting-room the morning after his arrival. A footman was waiting for orders, and she continued to open notes and scribble others as she talked. "What's this telegram? Oh . . . no answer. We shall be eight to dinner not ten. I shall send you in with this new Argentine girl, Maurice. I'll tell you all about her presently. . . . Say I shall want the car again at half-past four. I'm not at home to anybody except Lord Charlesworth and Major Bannister. Yes, I'm going out to lunch, but I shall be back by three. . . . That's all, Pearson. You're coming too, Maurice. The Havinghams, awful people, but one has to know them. There are three daughters, one's not bad, stiff with money of course . . . that's why, so to speak. Oh, but that Argentine. . . . Well, I haven't time now; anyhow, mind you make an impression. I've told them to send for Brewster and your things. Why didn't you come last night? I was out, but the servants expected you. I really must see something of you before you're off again. Ring the bell, dear. Do

you mind? I must have Miss Brown up and get rid of some of these letters. Don't forget, the car will be round at a quarter-past one. And now, darling, I must send you away."

Maurice betook himself to a dingy little back room, overlooking a mews. It had been his late brother-in-law's refuge when the honest struggle he made to turn himself into a man about town had been temporarily defeated by an overwhelming nostalgia for sloppy shabby coats, boots clogged with clay, and a lark singing freedom in high heaven. Poor old Jack, his honest red-faced presence seemed to linger among the battered pipes and prints of a midnight steeple-chase, ridden in night-shirts. Maurice wished he were here now. Not that he would probably have anything to suggest; Jack was not resourceful, also in spite of the sincerest intention to abstain from doing so, he would inevitably have told Patch all about it before the day was out. But even with that risk Maurice felt it would have been good to have him over there in that other shabby leather chair, knocking out his pipe against the grate and saying "damned hard luck" as he stared into the bowl instead of at the other speaker. He could have told Jack things he couldn't tell any of his own family—Archie, good

Lord, no—and Jack in his own dim way would have understood.

He had already spent an hour with a lawyer, endeavouring to persuade him that whatever the law might be, there must be some way of getting round it. The lawyer after treating him at first with tolerant amusement became exasperated and showed an inclination to find his professional honour impugned.

"Of course, as I said before, your friend, Mrs. X, as we will call her, could probably get a judicial separation," he remarked stiffly, "but in that case. . . ."

"What the h——. I mean what in thunder is the use of a judicial separation to a woman who's already got her husband locked up—they're as separated as they can be." Maurice had exploded.

The lawyer who had already explained the virtues of the arrangement more than once, looked at his clock and drummed his fingers on his blotting-pad.

Maurice felt all the fight go out of him.

"Sorry to have bothered you for nothing," he muttered, taking up his hat and stick. "Er—is this what I owe you?"

The lawyer became another person.

"Ah . . . yes. Many thanks, many thanks. Of

course one needn't absolutely despair. Human life has its limits. . . . People die even when they're wanted to. I—er, gather the lady wishes to marry again?"

"She does," said Maurice, "and I'm dashed if I can see why she shouldn't."

The swing doors shut behind him with a sound like a long sigh as he slowly made his way down the dirty stone steps which he had run up so lightly. The lower he went the lower sank his spirits, until by the time he reached the street he realized how much he had counted on this interview. For a moment he was half disposed to try somebody else—to go on seeing all the lawyers in London till he found one who would say what he wanted him to say. But after all what was the use of it? This man had only said what Whittaker had said, what all the books of reference he had been able to find in the club last night had said.

What was left? Nothing but to get away as soon as possible before he was driven off his head in Patch's whirligig. He rang up his doctor and found to his relief that he could see him the following morning.

Maurice had looked on the interview with his

doctor so much as a matter of form, that he went through the examination almost absent-mindedly. He could see as well as ever, and it only remained to have the fact officially recognized in order to obtain his release.

"That's all, I suppose? I can get the first boat that's going?" he asked when the doctor had apparently come to the end of his tests.

The doctor fidgeted with the instrument in his hand. He wondered why this young man, who seemed to have been born to the best that England could offer, should be so desperately anxious to return to the unsavoury spot where his regiment was located. It seemed in tune with the general contrariness of things that there was no sort of question of letting him go.

The sight had returned, it was true, he said, hesitatingly, but that wasn't all. The trouble had been mainly nervous, and even now his whole nervous system was in a bad state—in short, he seemed in a rather strung-up condition. If he went out now at the worst season of the year, overwork—overstrain of any kind might bring on recurrent attacks of blindness without the least warning and a strong possibility of permanent trouble.

He told his patient this, rather curtly, because he

was sorry for him and didn't know how to say so.

"Then I'll have to leave the service?" Maurice gasped.

"Well, I'm rather afraid you will, unless you can get an exchange into something here. In my opinion you'll never be safe to go East again. I'm surprised this Portuguese trip didn't do you more good, unless you've been overdoing it since you came back. When did you get back, by the way? The day before yesterday? Ah well, that's not long. Why don't you go to Norway for a few months' fishing? Nothing like fishing for the nerves. Get out of London anyhow, and do your best just to be free and happy and not think about anything, that's my cure."

Maurice found himself in the street, walking mechanically towards Cavendish Square. He was too much stunned to realize more than that the whole aspect of his life had been turned upside down. Rachel had gone and now his profession had gone. It was something of a surprise when he came face to face with a house where he sometimes dined and found it still standing in its place. Small facts, like gnats, each with its tiny sting, buzzed about his brain. He wouldn't need those polo boots he had ordered on the way here, or those new drill uni-

forms. He had given Brewster notice, and had spoken to a man he had met at dinner last night about taking him, but now he had better keep him himself.

He stood irresolutely at the edge of the pavement staring at the traffic passing up and down Oxford Street. Where was he going? He didn't know. He thought of what the doctor had said. Fishing in Norway? It was a savourless prospect that raised no appetite. Go down to Greyladies? Every room in the house, every corner of the garden had played some part in his dreams of a future shared with Rachel.

He presently found himself wandering down Bond Street with no very clear idea how he had come there. A stream of people going into a confectioner's suggested that it must be somewhere near lunch time. He wasn't hungry, didn't feel as if he ever would be—but perhaps if he ate something he wouldn't feel so light-headed. He thought there was a little place not far off down one of the side streets, where he wouldn't meet anybody he knew.

He strolled on, pausing from time to time to look vaguely in shop windows. There a silver basket full of heliotrope and forget-me-nots with a big mauve and blue bow in a florist's. It was just

what he would have ordered for Rachel, on her birthday. At Boucheron's he saw the perfect ring he would have sent with it.

As he turned away from the window, his brother came out of the shop and beckoned with his stick to a bright purple coupé. Archie was about the last person he wanted to see, but fortunately or otherwise the latter's attention was recalled to the shop by a dark highly coloured lady, with improbable bushes of fair hair on either side of her face who screamed from the doorway:

"Archie! Come back and settle with the man. It's the rubies I've chosen." And Archie trotted obediently back again.

Maurice plunged rather heedlessly into the traffic. No wonder Patch was in a fuss. Archie looked like a trapped bear. If he only got off this time it might be a lesson to him. But what on earth . . . well Archie would think him quite as much of a fool if it came to that.

When he got back to Curzon Street he was told that his sister wanted to see him as soon as he came in. They had telephoned to his club and various other places but had failed to find him.

He went quickly to her room. Patch at home and alone at five o'clock betokened something serious.

He wondered if she had dismissed Charlesworth, or had found out something more disastrous about Archie, or if one of the children down at Revals Langley was seriously ill, and speculated on the use she intended to put him to in any of these contingencies.

She was sitting at her writing-table but swung round as he came into the room. Without speaking she held out an open telegram.

"Sir Alexander stroke this morning condition critical Dawson," Maurice read. "This means we shall have to go down."

"Hum. Well, I don't know. I suppose somebody ought to. I've had another wire since. I don't gather there's any immediate danger."

Maurice waited for her to produce it, but she did not do so.

"He's not been well all winter," she went on. "Worrying about Archie mostly. I can't think how he gets hold of things."

"Have you told Archie about this wire?"

"I've done the only thing I could. Sent a note to his rooms, and told everybody I could think of, to send him here if they ran across him. He never turned up to lunch after promising faithfully he would. I suppose you've no idea where he is?"

"He's bound to get your note when he goes home to dress," said Maurice evading a direct reply.

Mrs. Reval sighed.

"I very much doubt if he'll go to Watersmeeting, and if he does the sight of him is enough to make father worse. He's perfectly frantic about this Slayback woman—says Archie's quite fool enough to marry her. I believe Aunt Tosh tells him things, she wants Archie for Phyllis Middlehouse. It looks as if you'd have to go, Maurice."

"Aren't you coming, too?"

Patch was running her pencil up and down a big silver framed engagement card.

"Of course I am. . . . The very first minute I can. From Saturday to Tuesday anyhow. You see it isn't as if it were urgent."

Maurice said nothing. Something in his silence made her uncomfortable.

"You won't be going to India this very minute, I suppose?" she inquired irritably. "Uncle Podge can always get you an extension."

Maurice hesitated. He shrank, as most people do, from hearing himself put facts into words.

"I'm not going at all. My eyes won't pass. I . . . I suppose I shall have to leave the service."

Patch stared at him.

"Leave the army? But you can see all right?"

Maurice repeated what the doctor had said.

She listened superficially, her mind busied with the general aspects of the case.

"It's an awful pity, of course," she remarked when he had finished. "You would have been bound to get on with all of us behind you. There's a chance, though it mustn't be talked of, that we may get India next year, in which case, of course, Harry would have had you on his staff. But after all, perhaps it's hardly worth worrying about it. The army's no career for a white man nowadays. I always wished you'd gone into diplomacy; perhaps it's not too late. . . . Anyhow, this makes it absolutely simple about father—you can go up there for a week and come back again later on."

Maurice walked across the room and took up a railway guide. He stood with his back to her, fluttering the leaves. He had always fancied that when Patch had time to think of him she was really very fond of him—not as fond as she was of Archie, but a very serviceable everyday kind of fondness, that would stand a good deal of wear and tear. But it looked as if this had all been so much moonshine. She neither cared nor took the trouble to understand what the doctor's verdict meant to him.

He thought of her perfect face, the beautiful velvety depths of her eyes, which seemed to hold the very spirits of love and laughter and tears. Tears! Patch had never shed a tear in her life, as far as he could remember, except when she was in a temper. All that she now saw in his misfortune was that it would save her a tiresome journey and a prolonged dose of Watersmeeting. How much, after all, did she really care about her father? To his younger son he had always been harsh, sometimes unjust, and once or twice downright cruel, but he had spoilt his two elder children scandalously, so people said, and they in return had provided the only instruments of discipline his hard self-willed old heart had ever encountered. Now his death would mean little more to one than the entire renewing of her wardrobe, and to the other an increased facility to run up bills.

Maurice shut up the guide and took up a telegraph form instead.

"I'll go to-night by the 7.15. I shall sleep at Carlisle, and they can send a car for me next morning," he said shortly.

Patch's colour rose.

"To-night. But I told you I'd had this other wire saying there was no immediate danger. These

strokes go on for months, and you won't be able to see him if you go. To-morrow'll be heaps of time. I must have you to-night. It's quite a little quiet thing, or of course I should have put it off. I can't get another man at the last minute like this, you never know where they are nowadays."

Maurice met her indignant eyes with irritating calm. She said to herself that people who didn't know him thought he looked so sympathetic, but when it came to appealing to his feelings he was really much harder than Archie.

"I'll ring up old Percy Lulworth—he'll always come," was all he would vouchsafe.

His sister was seriously disturbed. He had been in a queer state ever since he came back, at one minute in ill-assumed high spirits, and at another in the depths of depression. He was "nervy" too. It seemed as if he had got something on his mind. Something must have gone pretty wrong. It wasn't his sight, because he had been perfectly happy about that until he saw the doctor. What about that secretary woman? Now she came to think of it, he had never mentioned her. What had become of her? It was so tiresome of her to have turned out so much younger than she had at first appeared—almost an imposture. Perhaps she had tried to get

up an *affaire* with him. If Maurice hadn't felt like it, he would have made the most frightful mess of things. It was a pity in some ways that he wasn't more like Archie, who had frequently and superfluously informed his sister that in Maurice's shoes he would have contrived to spend a very pleasant winter.

The best thing to do was to get him settled down with some really nice girl. It was a pity he was so tiresome about the Argentine, but after all there were heaps of others.

Chapter XX

SIR ALEXANDER BANNISTER lay in the great four-post bed, in the room with the Grinling Gibbons mantelpiece, in which his ancestors had been born and for the most part had died; since, in the days of the first James, they had vacated the older part of the castle. Sir Alexander had been born there himself, one cold winter night more than seventy years before, and there in that high-backed chair beside the fire, where his younger son was sitting now, he too had sat through one long night waiting for his own father to die.

The old man had made a hard fight of it, lying there helplessly cursing the nurses, the doctors, his own son or anyone else who came within reach, as long as he could speak. And now that same son was lying in his place and remembering his own impatience of all this waiting and delay which was playing the deuce with his plans. Why the devil couldn't the old man have done and make an end of it? He had had his whack. It was time to go, since go he must, and let other and stronger hands take the reins.

His children, too, probably thought he was an unconscionable time in getting out of their way. Where were they? Where was Patricia—"little Patch" Archie had called her when he could hardly speak. She had too many of her own concerns to find time for him. They had said she was coming, but he didn't believe it. Archie? He wouldn't think of Archie, it made him have that funny feeling in his head again.

Tears of self-pity welled up in his eyes and trickled down the furrows of his cheeks, with a cold tickling sensation; but he could not move his hand to brush them away, or make any sound except a guttural mumbling. He was just a poor lonely old man. No single being would feel any real grief at his death, any more than he had felt any when his own father died. He was quite sure he was going to die, though that fool of a nurse-woman had told him firmly that he was much better. It was all too exactly like that other time, only now it was he who was in the bed. And that fellow there by the fire—he could just see the top of his black head above the chair—what was he thinking about? Was he, too, impatiently waiting for death to release him to return again to his own ambitions and pleasures? His father vaguely won-

dered what these were. He had always been a queer silent chap; you couldn't tell what he was at. Why had he come now instead of the other two?—this other one, whom he had never thought of more than he could help; born in the last and most miserable stage of a discordant marriage. He had never pretended to care much about him. He was altogether too much his mother's child.

He had been a fool to marry a woman of mixed blood, as she was. His own father had warned him—putting it coarsely as he would have done about his own short-horns. It had all come from that. But he had been besotted by her black eyes, and her almost Oriental grace. Well he had found out soon enough what that all meant—first her infernal jealousy, and after a time his own.

This boy was too like her . . . too like that foreigner cousin of hers. . . . He felt a kind of exasperation at being forced to notice him now, after all these years of successfully ignoring him. Now, too, when his brain no longer seemed his own, but must needs start trying rusty keys in old locks.

A slight haze seemed to be gathering in the room—the mist which rose on summer evenings from the moat, of course—not those thwarted shadows

which had bided their time all these years, now to assail him in his helplessness.

A log burnt through, fell between the dogs on the hearth. Maurice stood up to replace it. He looked at the bed and thought his father was asleep. He always seemed to be as far as his son could judge, though the nurse daily reported that he was "a lot brighter." He had given no sign that he recognized Maurice. What on earth had been the use in his coming here—except to give countenance to Dawson, and issue such orders as were not in anybody else's province.

Every afternoon he religiously spent an hour in this chair while the nurse had her rest, but he had thought so little about his father all his life that he would sometimes find himself wondering why he was there. The old man had been a dreaded but seldom visible fury that had haunted the background of his childhood, and dimly pursued him through the increasing years till his inheritance of his mother's small property had snapped the only real tie between them. He couldn't pretend to feel much now, if anything. He was here because there was no particular reason why he should be anywhere else. Here, at any rate, nobody bothered him. He was free to be as miserable as he felt.

Dim memories of his mother came to him as he sat watching the flames. There had been one afternoon when she had sat, all huddled up, in this same chair, and he had been beside her on the rug, playing with a little horse and cart—making it travel to the fender and then pulling it back again with a piece of string. He hadn't paid much attention to her, and it had startled him when she stooped and gathered him into her arms, with such sudden vehemence that one of the wheels had been broken off the cart. It must have been a day or two before she died, but of that he remembered nothing—only, that since that day no woman had ever kissed him with that passionate craving hunger, till Rachel had bidden him good-bye. He wished he could remember more. No one had ever been able to tell him much. Lady Bannister had been very lovely, they all said. He could see that for himself, from the Carolus Duran portrait of her in the white saloon. People also said, but more guardedly, that she had been very gay and her husband a hard man. The old caretaker at Greyladies had spoken of her as a wild limb of a girl, and all the gentlemen a-coming courting. Archie and Patch could only supply an indistinct medley. The former remembered her boxing his ears with a fan when he had broken a scent-

bottle, and the latter, with relish: "That she and Father used to fight like cat and dog." She was obviously a far less cherished memory to them than the pet animals that lay in the little cemetery in the park.

It was twenty-eight years now since she had been carried down to the big vault in the shadow of the church—a cold, grim place such as those dancing feet would never have sought of their own choice. If she had lived, how different it might all have been. If she hadn't been able to stand his father, he, Maurice, would have taken her away, and he and she would have made a home together such as he had never known, and now never would know. He was sure she was the kind of woman who would have understood all about Rachel.

The nurse had come into the room, and then begun to run about in a flurried way. She was telling one of the servants something at the door. To fetch the doctor? She was always starting these scares. Now she was back at the bed—and then speaking to him. Hadn't he noticed anything?

Maurice too walked over to the bed. Then he turned away again, and went downstairs.

Patch and Archie arrived the day following Sir

Alexander's death—the former excited and tearful. If she had only known it was so serious she would have come at once. Why hadn't Maurice let her know? What was that idiot Dawson about? Sudden at the last? Doctors ought to know when these things were likely to happen. In the midst of her lamentations, she found a chance of whispering that the wire had come just in the nick of time to snatch Archie from Mrs. Slayback's motor on its way to the Westminster Registry Office. Archie himself looked alternately embarrassed, sulky, and cheerful, as the various aspects of his new position struck him in turn. Watersmeeting was his, and a very great deal more besides, with the provision that he at no time contracted any marriage or form of marriage with any person who was not eligible for presentation at Court. Patch had flown at him.

"Archie, for goodness' sake tell me. Oh, you haven't been such an awful fool?"

Archie dabbed his forehead, and found a portion of his voice. "Thank God, no," he whispered. "But it was a damned near thing."

Maurice would gladly have gone away immediately after the funeral, instead of hanging about, very well aware that neither of the other two wanted him, but he was obliged to superintend the removal

of certain possessions of his mother's which had remained at Watersmeeting after her death and now became his. He still had no very clear idea what he would do next. Greyladies was empty now. Of the old couple who had leased it: one was dead, and the other gone to live with a married daughter. He supposed he could put in a few weeks seeing to the repairs of the place, and what chance there was of doing a little farming. After that he might go abroad again. Rachel had talked about Sienna. It didn't matter; wherever he went he would be equally lonely. As for this idea of Patch's that he should somehow be jumped into Diplomacy—it was the last life he desired. He shrank from trying most other employments. After all, he had enough to keep himself and a bit over, what right had he to take bread out of the mouths of the demobilized and the axed?

From time to time he wondered if Rachel had seen his name among the people who were present at his father's funeral. Unless something of the sort happened, she would probably think he was on his way to India. If she knew he was still in England, he tried to think that she might write to his club—just to ask what the doctor had said.

He had written to her, over and over again, sit-

ting up half the night, pouring out his sore heart in hot, incoherent sentences, covering page after page, which he never reread, and burnt when the morning came. It would do no good to make her as miserable as he was himself. She might not be happy —in his bitterest moods he had never succeeded in convincing himself that she was that—but there was a chance that she might achieve a sort of quiet if he let her alone.

He was telling himself so one afternoon to the tune of Brewster's hammer as he nailed up a case of pictures. They were up in the old nursery, which had remained empty since Maurice himself had vacated it, and the acid-faced nurse who had presided over his early years had been pensioned off.

He stood by the table, idly fluttering the leaves of a pile of books, a few school prizes which he had never shown to anybody, because no one seemed very much interested, and schoolboy stories which he had devoured in secluded parts of the park. The very sight of their bright covers brought back the smell of bracken and the taste of greengages. Patch's boys should have them, when they came to Greyladies. He must try and see more of them in future. He would have plenty of time. Good Lord. What wouldn't there be time for?

He began to put the books into an open box, and then noticing that their edges were dusty, told Brewster to go and get a cloth.

"Hurry up," he repeated as the man did not move.

Brewster was on his knees by a packing-case, gazing at one of the torn sheets of newspaper he had been stuffing down the sides. He was slowly and half audibly reading something to himself.

"What have you got there?" asked his master.

"Would this be our Mrs. Cassilis, poor lady, sir?" he asked.

Maurice had the paper out of his hand before he finished speaking.

"What? Where? What about Mrs. Cassilis?"

"Down there, sir, by your thumb—"Attempted Murder and Suicide of a well-known K.C."

Maurice found the passage indicated.

"At Boxmouth yesterday an inquest was held on the body of Edward Cassilis, K.C., 45, barrister-at-law. Mr. Cassilis, who had recently suffered from a serious nervous breakdown was walking back from the shore with his wife, when, just as they reached the summit of a footbridge crossing the railway, he was seen to seize her in his arms, apparently with the intention of jumping with her on

to the track. Mrs. Cassilis fortunately managed to save herself by clinging to the railings until assistance reached her, but her husband who was a powerfully built man, broke away and threw himself in front of the 4.10 express. The engine-driver who had seen him fall, at once applied his brakes, but could not succeed in stopping the train until the engine and first two carriages had passed over him. Mrs. Cassilis was removed to the Boxmouth Hospital, where she was found to be suffering from an injured ankle and severe shock. Dr. Algernon Cassilis, brother of the deceased gave evidence . . ."

The rest was a blur to Maurice's eyes.

"Narrer escape, that was," he heard Brewster say. "Whatever made 'im do it? Must have been . . ."

"Here you can leave all this and finish it to-morrow," his master interrupted.

"It don't want more than three-quarters of an hour to dinner, sir, so should I come and tell you when the dressing-bell goes?"

But Maurice could only answer by an impatient jerk of his head in the direction of the door.

The hot blood sang in his ears and ebbed again, leaving him so sick and dizzy that he was forced to

sit down. But only for a moment, and he was on his feet, tramping up and down the room. So she had gone back to her husband? Why? Pressure from the Morlands? Force of circumstances? Old stirrings of affection? No, no, not that. . . . Had she known when she left Monte Felis?—and hadn't told him. "Bad news," she had said to old Whittaker. Could there have been worse?

The hideous scene rose before him. Rachel's little gloved hands—such absurd little hands—frantically clutching at the rail; her white, piteous face; the terror in her grey eyes; and that brute, with his mad, devil's face, leaning over her, grinning, dragging at her slim waist, her slender arms. . . .

A cold dampness broke out over his forehead, as he sank down on the old sofa, his head in his shaking hands.

But the hound was dead. Dead as a doornail. They had had an inquest on him and buried him. There was no coming back from that. He would never trouble her again. She was free. Nothing on earth stood between them. How and where and how soon could he find her?

They had taken her to the hospital, poor darling, but he would have her out of that. He could nurse her better than they could. . . . The date at the

top of the paper caught his eye. Good Lord! It was three weeks ago. It had happened while he was still at Monte Felis. She had been free when he got back to London, and he hadn't known it, perhaps might never have known it if Brewster hadn't got hold of that bit of paper. Good God!

And now? The next thing was to find her, not to lose another instant. He would go to Boxmouth at once. But wait, if it had all happened three weeks ago the chances were she had left. After some effort at concentrated thought he decided to wire to the hospital at Boxmouth telling them to reply to his club if Mrs. Cassilis was still there, and if not, where she had gone. He would find the answer when he got to town and would lose no more precious time on false scents.

By motoring to Carlisle he could catch the Scotch express and be in town by half-past seven to-morrow morning.

Chapter XXI

THERE was no reply to his wire when he reached the club, which, as the porter in shirt sleeves tried to explain to him, was not surprising. He was for starting off to Boxmouth on the spot—but finally allowed himself to be persuaded that by the time he had had breakfast some opportunity would have been given the telegram of getting itself delivered and answered. It came at last and brought the news he had feared. Mrs. Cassilis had left a fortnight earlier, address unknown. There was nothing to be done but to see what he could get out of the Morlands.

At a quarter to five, that afternoon he was standing in the Gothic porch of Morley Edge. In the train coming down hope had revived, it even seemed possible that Rachel might be here. His heart beat so violently that he thought it would strangle his voice when the door was opened. But of this there seemed no immediate chance.

He looked about him, at the red shale paths with the faint down of green towards their edges, and at

the neatly clipped shrubs which he knew dissembled the kitchen windows. By stepping back a little he would be able to see the tennis-court. It was all just as Rachel had said. Rain had fallen with silent, inevitable persistency since early morning, and on the damp air hung a pungent smell of decayed vegetation from the kitchen garden. From the little tortuous drive came the drip, drip of the lime trees.

In every window in the house the blinds were drawn to exactly the same height.

"Oh, my poor Rachel," Maurice breathed, laughter in his eyes, and then with a gust of impatience: "Deuce take them, why can't they answer the bell?"

He rang again, this time a peal that clanged through the house, and was almost immediately followed by the appearance of a flustered parlour-maid.

Maurice's arrival had been duly observed by Mrs. Morland. On hearing wheels, she had at once betaken herself to her usual post of observation behind the morning-room window curtain, in order to see if it was a caller who was worth admitting. Instead of any of their acquaintances, however, she had reported to her youngest daughter, who was spending the day with her, that it was a young man and a total stranger. He had driven up in the station cab which he had then dismissed.

Who on earth could he be? Mrs. Morland was lost in conjecture. He looked well, how should she say? Londonny, was the best word she could think of.

Enid was comfortably settled in a basket chair, knitting a little vest, and had not enough curiosity to move; besides he must be in the porch by now and out of sight. Suddenly a thought struck her.

"Could it be that man of Rachel's?"

They stared at each other in excited apprehension.

"Stop, Annie," Enid exclaimed, as the parlour-maid crossed the hall. Mrs. Morland put her head round the door and hissed a muffled command to her to "wait a minute." She returned to Enid.

A rapid argument followed. Should he be told they were out, and thus got rid of without unpleasantness, or had they better have him in and show him once and for all that he was not likely to get anything out of people like they were? Mrs. Morland was for the former course, which would give them time to get Mr. Morland's instructions, should the man have the temerity to call again. But, Enid argued, another day Rachel might be at home. Better finish him out of hand.

Then came the question, should they receive him

in the morning-room as they would have done a secondary sort of caller, such as a person coming to ask for a subscription, or might he not from sheer perversity, see something informal and friendly in it? On the whole it was better for Annie to quickly set a match to the drawing-room fire.

Enid was sorry that she was not wearing her new tea-gown. However, she did the best she could by putting a rose-coloured cushion behind her head, and assuming a haughty expression. Her mother chose out the two best flower vases in the morning-room and carried them across to the drawing-room mantelpiece.

The scene was just set, when Maurice's second assault on the bell brought any further preparations to an abrupt conclusion. Mrs. Morland took the chair opposite Enid's with the ungraceful rapidity of a person playing "musical chairs," and crossed her feet.

They listened in tense silence to the opening of the front door, and a quick firm tread in the hall, accompanied by the crackling of Annie's apron.

"Captain Bannister," the maid announced, in a voice that was not without emotion.

If Maurice had been less intent on his own affairs, he might have been more sensitive to the at-

mosphere into which he had plunged. The faces of both ladies were suffused with a vivid crimson. Mrs. Morland's voice was faint, and she glared at him with the dumb hostility of an affronted sheep.

"How do you do? My daughter, Mrs. ——" for the moment she had almost forgotten Enid's married name—"er—Willson."

She waved him to a small chair.

"I must apologize for calling," began Maurice fluently. "I hoped that I might find Mrs. Cassilis here, or that you could tell me where she is. You may remember that she was so very good as to go abroad with me last winter?"

He paused, but neither of the ladies seemed to have anything to say.

"Perhaps you could give me her address?"

They continued to stare over his head, getting redder and redder. Maurice who was pretty well aware that difficulties of the feminine gender usually gave him very little trouble, felt his morale shaken.

"I'm afraid she's been having a rotten time," he suggested lamely, and then was seized with an awful terror that there was something so much the matter with her that they could not bring themselves to speak of it.

Mrs. Morland withdrew her eyes from the picture rail and fixed them on the fender.

"My niece had had the very terrible sorrow of losing her husband," she announced heavily.

"So I heard. . . . It was that that made me think I'd look her up"—that was absolutely true, anyhow —"How is she?"

"My niece is not likely to feel equal to meeting strangers for some time to come," Mrs. Morland proceeded in the same tone of repressive gloom. "It was a most terrible blow to her to lose dear Edward so suddenly and so tragically. They were *so* devoted."

Maurice seemed temporarily silenced, so she droned on:

"They had been married just ten years, ten happy years. I am sure the only sorrow they can have had, except that they had no children, was his delicate health; but he was so much better, and they were so happy to be together again. You know how it all happened? The poor fellow who was always so nervous about her, was afraid in some way that she was going to fall, and, as we think, in trying to save her, over-balanced himself. Unfortunately the newspapers got hold of some people who didn't see it properly, and, of course, knew

nothing about Edward, and made up some sort of tale out of it. No one who knew him could believe such a thing for a moment. Could they, Enid?"

Her inspiration was running dry. Enid took up her cue.

"Oh dear, no. Edward was quite absurd about her. He simply gave her everything she wanted. It used to amaze us. But then we Morlands spoil our husbands, at least mine says so."

She gave the little laugh she kept for company. This Captain Bannister was disconcertingly good-looking, and something else too, which was less easy to define, but it made it very difficult to be disagreeable to him. For the first time it struck her how badly Tom's hair was cut, and how short and stubby his hands were. The small jealousy of Rachel, that had always rankled unacknowledged in her heart blossomed into a good healthy hatred. Suppose this man with his good looks, perfect clothes, and fine connections, went and married her? Her parents might define their fears as "not wanting to have him hanging round her," but Enid's were more concrete. Men were so funny about Rachel. He had taken the trouble to come all the way down to Crampton to call on her. At all costs she must be prevented from scoring this last point.

"We don't see as much of Rachel as we should like, or, as we feel would be good for her," she went on, fixing her eyes on her knitting, and speaking in a low, serious voice. "She did something we couldn't approve of. Her ideas have never been ours. She had a great friendship with a man we do not like. It upset poor Edward terribly, though I believe he forgave her. But well, you may as well know it, she deceived us all and went away with him."

Mrs. Morland surveyed her younger daughter with mingled dismay and admiration. Was this the fruit of the long and painfully thought out upbringing?—the carefully chosen schools and governesses—that Enid could . . . well, put things like a politician? When this horrid man (so different from their own friends, who evidently wanted to get hold of Rachel for her money) had gone away, she would quite gently tell Enid that she thought she had gone a little too far, though in a case like this one *had* to say something.

Their visitor had risen to his feet. He looked very tall and very rigid as he stood between them. His profile reminded Mrs. Morland of the bronze figure holding the lamp in the billiard-room, which Mr. Morland had bought at Christie's. He looked

less than ever like one of their own friends. She couldn't see his eyes because his head was turned towards Enid, who seemed to huddle lower in her chair.

"I'm sorry I troubled you," he was saying. There was a vibration in his voice that was not at all pleasant. "Mrs. Cassilis' private affairs are, no doubt, of interest to her relations. I fear I can't claim any right to an intimate acquaintance with them. You cannot give me her address? No? Then I am afraid there is nothing for me to do, but to again apologize for troubling you. Good-bye."

He bowed to each of them in turn, and had reached the door before Mrs. Morland had time to ring the bell.

They waited till the front door slammed before they spoke.

Enid broke the silence.

"Where's Rachel this afternoon?"

"She went to old Lady Foxcroft against my wishes and advice, but as it turns out perhaps it was a good thing. What a mercy she didn't come in."

A pause.

"I think I put him off." Enid's sullen expression gradually gave place to a sort of conceited spite.

Her mother hesitated.

"Well, dear, of course, it was one of those extreme cases when one has to act for the best. You are so very accurate as a rule. . . ."

"It was perfectly true," Enid interrupted. "Rachel has any amount of notions we don't like, and you told me yourself that Edward was very much upset about her going off to Portugal like that. There was no need to tell the man I meant himself."

Mrs. Morland was struggling in a tangle of conflicting emotions. She didn't think her daughter ought to have done it, but she was very glad she *had* done it.

Neither spoke again till the sound of a train broke the stillness, when they turned simultaneously, and looked out of the window, whence a railway embankment was visible through a thin fringe of trees.

"The six o'clock—he'll have gone by that," said Enid.

"And Rachel is safe," echoed her mother, with mild drama, breaking into smiles. "Father will be in soon. I'm sure he will think we managed uncommonly well. Perhaps I had better say a word to Annie, by the way. I'll tell her that it was somebody connected with poor Edward's last illness (in a way it was), and that it would only upset Rachel if she had known he had been here. . . .

Now I've seen him I'm more thankful than ever we've got rid of him. He's not at all like *our* friends. I'm sure when I looked at him, I felt thankful that Harold and Tom weren't that kind of man."

Enid gave an impatient flounce.

"In my opinion, Rachel ought to have been shut up instead of Edward. She is too silly to be left to her own devices. When she marries again—and I suppose she won't be happy till she does—I only hope she won't try to hook herself on to the fringe of the aristocracy."

Mrs. Morland nodded her head up and down.

"Well, dear, you know father and I have always said that no good comes of mixing up with those sort of people. They haven't our ideas of right and wrong."

Chapter XXII

MAURICE swung down the brief drive under the dripping lime trees, angrier than he had ever been in his life before. He told himself that he had only just got away in time; another word, and he would have been telling that lumpish cow of a woman exactly what he thought of her and her clumsy lies. And the old one, too, just as bad. Good God! To think that Rachel had lived with them for years on end. Well, there should be no more of that. If he could prevent it, she should never see or speak to them again. It was just like her to try and make the best of them; but now he had seen them for himself, she couldn't dress them up any longer. He remembered with astonishment that he had laughed at them through her eyes, till he had come to feel quite a kindness for them. In his imagination they had shared something of the glamour that surrounded everything that belonged to her. They were doubtless absurd, limited, too, in ways that might be tire-

some if one had too much of them; but after all there must be something rather attractive, rather Cranfordish, in their funny little foibles. Coming down in the train he had found it not only possible, but amusing, to imagine himself playing golf with Tom and Harold. But now this harmonious picture was torn to shreds. They were just ordinary hypocrites and liars.

Then, too, they were obviously violently hostile to himself. But why? In Heaven's name, why? He thought he had been careful enough to let no hint escape him that his desire to see Rachel was prompted by anything but placid friendship. They might have thought it was "too soon" for anything else. As for himself, he thought, without undue conceit, that there was nothing to which they could reasonably object.

What might not his poor Rachel have suffered from such spite? How was she? Where was she? Where had they hidden her? There was nothing else for it, repulsive as the idea was, he would have to go to a Private Enquiry Agent and have her traced. They hadn't the power to keep her from him. Vague notions of the Habeas Corpus Act floated about his brain. He would go to a really sharp lawyer first thing to-morrow, not that fool

he'd been to before, and see what could be done about unlawful detention or whatever it was called.

He looked at his watch and realized that in the first place he had lost his train back to town, and that in the second that he hadn't the faintest idea where he was. In his blind fury he had tramped on, looking neither to right nor left, and now he found himself in a quiet country road leading to nowhere in particular, unless it was to a large house standing in park-like fields.

A creaking board, hanging on a tree near the gate bore a half obliterated notice that Crampton Manor, and four hundred acres of valuable grazing land, were for sale without reserve.

Maurice read the notice. So this was where he had spent those long weeks last year—where he had first come to know Rachel. He remembered hearing something about the convalescent home having been moved to somewhere near the sea. So it was empty now and for sale. That meant he could go in.

Something more than curiosity beckoned him through the paintless gate, and up the moss-grown drive.

Soon he came to a sunk fence, bounding the gardens, and found himself walking between broken,

ill-trimmed rhododendrons. Another turn and the house itself stood before him, grim and grey and shabby, with rows of black windows like sightless eyes. Wisps of straw and old newspaper, such as dog's furniture on the move, lay about the corners of the steps. Now at last, after two hundred years' existence, the old house was dead—hushed and silent as the voices and feet that had once filled it with sound. Round about it in the dank grass, copper beeches and cedars stood like mourners, weeping for the life that would never return.

Maurice looked up at the blank windows and wondered which room had been his. He wanted to go inside, but the bell had been removed. For some time he fruitlessly rattled his stick on the door, where the paint was dry and wrinkled like the skin of a mummy. There was a faint hollow echo, but no answering footsteps. Perhaps round at the back he might come across a gardener or someone who would let him in. It was absurd, because even if he succeeded in gaining an entrance, it would soon be too dark to see anything. Nevertheless, he wanted to go in.

He turned away from the door, and looked about him. To the right of the house there was a cutting in the shrubs, which might be a path leading to the

back regions. He started down it, but found that it wound away from, rather than towards, the house. It was very overgrown with dripping laburnums that dashed soft wet tassels of golden flowers in his face. He could only see a couple of yards ahead. He knew it was fruitless to pursue the path which was obviously taking him in the wrong direction, but a faint sense of adventure drew him on.

Presently he heard someone coming towards him —footsteps and the sound of a branch being pushed aside, and then springing back. A gardener, perhaps, who would tell him off for trespassing. Whoever it was was walking very slowly; it almost seemed as if they were lame.

He came suddenly on a little clearing, where the path widened to admit a sundial and a stone seat. On the further side where it went on again, was a big bush of flowering currant, and by it a tall woman with a long black veil, whose white face shone faintly distinct in the twilight.

She was peering forward, as if to see who was coming towards her.

Maurice's heart gave a great bound and then seemed to stand quite still. On the woman's face, fear, bewilderment, and then as he held out his arms, wild, incredulous joy.

"Rachel!"

His voice sounded hoarse in his own ears, but she knew it better than his face.

"You're coming with me now, Rachel, aren't you?" he whispered after a time.

"Yes."

"To-night, I mean?"

"Yes."

There was no doubt or hesitation in her replies. She looked up into his face and smiled.

"We'll go to town to-night. I'll take you to Patch's house, and in the morning we'll get married; it'll have to be a registry office, until I can get a special licence and go down to Greyladies in the afternoon. I'm not going to let you go near those brutes again."

"Who?"

"Never mind, I'll tell you all about it in the train. Where's the nearest station? We'd better not go back to Crampton."

Rachel tried to think, and presently remembered that there was an inn on the road, beyond the wood.

"They have a horse and trap for hire there. Perhaps," she went on dreamily, "we could drive to Englebridge and wait for a train."

"Come then." . . . But neither of them moved.

"We've got to go," whispered Maurice in the same dreamy tone. A great peace enfolded them, one of those hushed hours when time and place lose all meaning. The light had faded out of the patch of sky above their heads.

It was Rachel who at last gently released herself. She slipped her arm through his, as she had done in the days of his blindness. Fortunately, it was but a little way that they had to go, for she could only walk with difficulty. Once she stumbled, and then found herself lifted up, and carried, till the lights of a small building came in sight.

Whispering to her to wait for him, Maurice set her down on the bank at the side of the road, and presently returned driving a dog-cart. He lifted her into it and drove off rapidly down a dark deserted road. Once he spoke—to ask her how soon she thought she would be missed.

"Not for ages, I very often don't come down to dinner, and the servants will think I've stayed with Lady Foxcroft."

But Maurice still frowned. Nor did his expression relax till they were in the train.

"I shan't have a quiet mind till we're through that registrar's hands," he said. "That woman shook my nerve."

Rachel laughed—the first time for many a day. She laughed still more when he described his interview with her relatives.

"Oh, how like Enid! It must have been Enid, Violet's not so resourceful."

"But who on earth was the man she was talking about?" he asked after a time. There was a faint undercurrent of jealousy in his voice of which he was deeply ashamed. Rachel heard it, and after a puzzled pause, laughed again.

"Why *you,* you goose! You see, I was never very explicit in my letters; and then it all came out and they were in a dreadful fuss."

Comprehension began to dawn on Maurice.

"That's why they didn't seem to take to me then? I say you won't want to have them to stay with us very often, will you?"

THE END

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